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Gamers can be a grumpy bunch sometimes. The expectation of new hardware that everyone built up before E3 has now come crashing down around us. It was a very high expectation, and it's taken some time to land, but many are now finding it hard to be optimistic about what's to come gaming-wise. We wanted, nay expected, a next-generation machine and now here we are in August and it's kinda blown up in our faces. That's right, we have expectation all over our collective faces. Loads of it. That's why folk are being grumpy.

In truth, though, there is a lot to look forward to. It's just well hidden. Under the admittedly thick skin of sequels, there's plenty of newness and excitement forming. Don't believe me? Head over to page 57. We've had a good hard peek and come up with the 40 brand new IPs that you should be paying attention to. These are the titles that are shaking things up and lighting the way for others. It's these that you should be following closely and looking forward to. And, ultimately, it's likely that these will be the games that enjoy the magical level of success that guarantees they'll have the number three after their title in a few short years. That's not to say the sequels aren't worth a look, of course. The coming months are stacked with must-play triple-AAA sequels; just don't forget to save a little excitement for the underdogs.

Enjoy the issue.

Rick Porter
EDITOR IN CHIEF

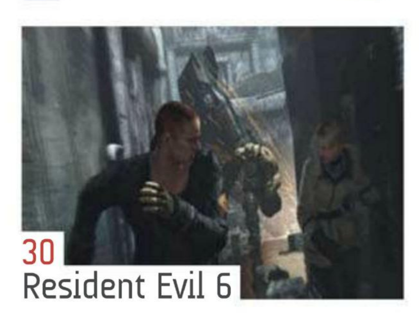

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Turn to page 82

(IT'S A SONY WORLD)

Sony's $380 million gamble

→ With Sony's acquisition of Gaikai, **games™** examines the huge potential of the cloud for the PS4 and why it could be the firm's key to success in a changing market



It's always a gamble going first in gaming: the history of the medium is littered with pioneering technologies that didn't take, or systems that were quickly abandoned by gamers in favour of their iteratively better implemented competition – but it's just as risky not to invest in new technologies and let the competition get the drop on you. Sega never recovered from its Dreamcast-era gaffes, and only the success of the Wii allowed Nintendo to recover from having eschewed disc-based technology for the N64. As the current generation winds down, and in a post-Apple world where connectivity and content are king and providing greater processing power is no longer enough, it's the risks Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft take with the technology in their next-generation consoles that will frame gaming's future.

Sony's recent acquisition of cloud-based streaming gaming service Gaikai for $380 million is arguably such a risk. But its adoption of cloud gaming as part of the PS4's predicted offering in 2013 clearly has massive potential – and it's increasingly clear that any platform holder wanting to prosper in the next generation should be looking to follow Sony. "Only Sony knows the real reason they bought Gaikai," says industry veteran Ian Livingstone, "but clearly they see that consoles, in terms of hardware, must have a limited life." According to Livingstone it's a matter of 'historical inevitability' that

DATA STREAM → IAN LIVINGSTONE CALLS UPON GOVERNMENT TO GIVE EVERY SCHOOLCHILD A RASPBERRY PI

Contents

Your guide to the essential stories

Left There are even grounds to suggest that Sony doesn't actually need to release a PS4 to retail; it could simply create its cloud network with banks of uber-powerful machines sitting in servers and run the entire experience from there. It's unlikely given its traditional bias, but the potential is there.



all games distribution becomes digital. In such a world it makes sense for the next generation of consoles to have the sense of connectivity that Apple has pioneered and be able to deliver content in a purely digital form, both hallmarks of a cloud streaming service. "Everyone is going to race to have the best proposition for that and clearly Sony see the acquisition of Gaikai as enabling them to have the best proposition that consumers will want to take part in," says Livingstone.

THE INCLUSION OF a cloud gaming service on the PS4, and the PlayStation Network even before the launch of Sony's next-gen console, could turn the console concept on its head. Not only is there the potential for digitally downloading or live streaming the next generation of games, but you would be able to play them – and classic PSone, PS2 and PS3 games – across Sony's various gaming devices. With Gaikai, cloud gaming could form the heart of a Sony network, putting both a wealth of hardcore and casual content in the hands of gamers on all Sony's gaming devices, and making it the most attractive option for next-generation developers. It's something that Dave Perry, the man behind Gaikai, sees as one of the core benefits of integrating a cloud element onto all gaming platforms, not just the PS4.

"The whole world is changing for developers," says Perry. "They have more choices than ever before as to where they can put their products, but ultimately they need to get the maximum reach possible. They're gonna get behind whoever helps them get in front of the most eyeballs at the end of the day." For Perry it's a simple →

> "That's why I get excited about our deal with Sony, because it gives us the best of both worlds: we can have the cloud and we can have the console"
>
> David Perry, Gaikai








concept: developers making great games and being able to get them to millions of gamers. "That's why I get excited about our deal with Sony, because it gives us the best of both worlds," he says. "We can have the cloud and we can have the console, and that to me is just a pretty sweet spot."

While Sony isn't ready to divulge exactly how it'll use Gaikai, Perry's excited about the deal beyond just delivering content to systems like the PS4 and Vita. "It got a little bigger than that because Sony also have an ecosystem," explains Perry, who had been putting together deals with TV makers like LG and Samsung to provide them with gaming content prior to the Sony deal. "They have other devices too; they have phones and TVs and DVD players," he says, "and to have that entire ecosystem plus the cloud is really interesting to me." It's a statement that conjures up a bevy of previously unimaginable images, not least of all playing PS4 and Sony retro games on your smart TV, through your DVD/Blu-ray player or even your phone. Cross-play between the PS4, Vita, Sony tablets; PC browsers and mobiles expedited at high speed through the cloud; and developers creating games that play differently on different platforms all become a tantalising possibility.

"Software has to fundamentally change," says Perry of how developers will tackle gaming for cloud in the future, "and software has to ask questions. Question number one is where am I running? Am I running on the device or am I running somewhere else? Question number two: what is this thing I'm running on?" According to Perry, games will have to recognise the traits of the device they're being played upon via the cloud, tailoring gameplay for features like touch screens, cameras and so on. "And the third question, which I think is the most exciting, " he says, "is how much power do I need? Currently you have to design and cripple your game down to the device and I think in the future you'll be designing games to auto-configure to the device and use its input methods, but graphically look breathtaking because it's not using the chips in that device."

Above Sony has a rich well of IP to draw upon for its cloud-driven network, and the promise of being able to play popular franchises on other platforms is an enticing one for many gamers.

It's certainly an intriguing prospect even if we're unlikely to see it in the early life cycle of cloud-integrated platforms like the PS4, but there's already plenty for gamers to get excited about and Sony's development teams clearly share that sense of excitement. The UK-based Studio Liverpool, widely regarded both creatively and technically as one of Sony's cutting-edge teams and the keeper of its iconic *WipEout* franchise, is one of them. Its innovative work on PS Vita launch title *WipEout 2048* saw it organically integrate bespoke Vita features like touch and motion controls in a hardcore game and create Sony's first cross-play title, with players on both the Vita and PS3. While Sony isn't making any official statements as to how it'll implement cloud gaming yet, talking to individual developers it's clear they can see plenty of potential for it.

"IT'S AN AWESOME concept, the whole cloud gaming thing," says Graeme Ankers, Studio Director at Studio Liverpool. His team can see how the handheld market is changing with growing emphasis on connectivity between devices and are looking forward to embracing the potential of cloud gaming for both things like cloud-based cross-play and second-screen gaming on Sony devices. "It's great, and again that's just another layer of things we can do." For Ankers there are still plenty of questions to be asked as to just how those additional screens or devices would be used in game design and what meaningful ways they would feed back into a game experience, but there's plenty of scope. "It just opens up a whole world of possibilities."

For the team's technical director Stuart Lovegrove, who helped to pioneer many of *WipEout 2048*'s cross-play technical advances,

Play Anywhere

The promise of a Sony ecosystem means any media device could let you play Sony games



Sony TVs

■ Sony has been battling for years now to keep its TV business profitable in the face of growing competition. The inclusion of Sony Gaikai on those products could make its TVs the gaming centre of the living room again.



PC/laptops

■ It might seem incongruous, but if Sony takes the cloud concept all the way, we could be playing Sony games on PCs or laptops through our web browsers.



Sony mobile phones

■ The smartphone revolution has already transformed gaming as we know it, but a Sony games network could further fuel mobile gaming.

Internet TV/Blu-ray/DVD

■ With a Gaikai-driven Sony network, any media device in your living room could become a dedicated PS4 games centre.





PS Vita

■ Sony's current-gen handheld would form the vanguard of the new network's mobile side, with extra features for hardcore fans.



PS3

■ The PS3 isn't going to go away even when the next generation arrives, as it'll still be a viable platform for PS4 Gaikai content.



HIGH MOON STUDIOS HAS ANNOUNCED IT'S CURRENTLY WORKING ON A DEADPOOL GAME FOR 2013

Notorious Network

→ How Gaikai will work on slow networks like the UK's

WHILE THE PROSPECT of the PS4 as the hub of a Sony gaming ecosystem is an exciting one, we're still a fair distance from Gaikai's recommended connection speed of at least 5Mbit/s in the UK, with broadband speeds currently around 8.8Mbit/s in urban areas and about 3.3Mbit/s in rural ones.

But it's a problem Perry claims Gaikai can solve. "To help you understand why cloud gaming isn't a crazy idea, try this: if you think about how long it takes to make a frame of a game on your computer, but consider that if I put it in the cloud and run it on a faster server, I can actually compress the time a little, and I can use that time saved to transmit the image to you. So you're not aware that it's running faster because I'm overclocking the cloud, but the net result is that it somehow got to you playing perfect when supposedly the internet makes everything slower!"

The Gaikai team have also been working with smart TV makers to make digital connections to the internet faster to reduce latency, and on a second technology of non-linear progressive downloads.

That will see games downloading themselves onto your computer, but only the code needed to run the game. Using that together with cloud streaming Perry claims is the solution. "We're keeping it real, we're not crazy. We understand that not everyone in the world has amazing bandwidth, but that's the lethal combination to solve the problem."



Above With the Sony cloud comes the potential of turning any device into a games platform or peripheral.

all the possible applications of the Sony cloud are an exciting prospect. " We do like change," he says. "That's the thing, it's good because it gives us more challenges and we're be able to say, 'Oh yeah we can actually do more things!' " Stu Tilly, the director on *WipEout 2048*, agrees and – while, like Ankers, recognises there will always be gamers looking for high production experiences currently only available on powerful consoles – can envision a situation in which the ongoing technical limitations of mobile devices are no longer a problem because a more powerful Sony system on the other end of the cloud is doing the heavy lifting. "That's why the whole Gaikai thing is so interesting from that perspective, and I think [that application] will be there," says Tilly. "It'll have its own problems as well: obviously you're going to need bandwidth in all areas, but graphically at least, those games will be developed on cutting-edge tech that over time will be constantly upgraded. There are going to be some pretty amazing experiences on there."

LOOKING AT THE possibilities that fully integrating Gaikai into the PS4 would give Sony makes rumours that other, undisclosed platform holders are looking at services like OnLive understandable. To Livingstone, as games increasingly become a service delivered by digital means, as opposed to a product, the idea of a PlayStation network that works across multiple platforms and has its games played on any device that can access the network makes perfect sense. "People say cash is king," he comments. "I say content is King Kong, because your IP can be put on any platform as a product or a service. It doesn't matter what, there are no boundaries for content; it's best if you can leverage the IP across a multitude of formats." While it's hard not to do a mental double take at the idea of playing a special version of *Uncharted 5* or the next *Resistance* on a smartphone or even an iPad, that's the sort of open platform future that Livingstone's vision and the potential of Gaikai suggest. "Those companies that are in traditional hardware at the moment, in any walled garden," says Livingstone, "are building problems for themselves. If I were in charge of Nintendo, I would undoubtedly put Mario on the iPad – why not? The power of the IP Nintendo have got is extraordinary, and they're denying themselves a huge opportunity."

It's clear then that Sony may just have caught the wave of the future and it could give the PS4 a serious advantage in the next generation. But simply being the first to enter the cloud realm, at least from a gaming perspective, won't be enough to get the job done. According to Pete Smith, executive producer on Sony's *LittleBigPlanet* franchise, the challenge of connected gaming in general is getting the content right. "Everyone is talking about connectivity, but I think that what you've got to make sure you do, be it the PS3 or the Vita, or a mobile phone, is you've just got to make sure you're building your content specifically for that platform," says Smith. "With mobile, what I don't believe what you'd want to do is create the same experience you'd get on PS3 on a mobile. With technology today we could probably do that now, or certainly in the next few years, but that wouldn't be right, because actually people use mobiles in different ways." Smith believes experiences have to be tailored to what people want, which on mobile is a lighter more 'drop in, drop out' experience – and if your aim is cross-play, to make it work organically with your main game. For Smith too then, everything is about content, albeit it in a more bespoke sense, and that's what he finds appealing about the cloud's possibilities. "I think that we can say cloud gaming is really interesting because cloud gaming will again focus people on content, and that's ace."

> "Those companies that are in traditional hardware at the moment, in any walled garden, are building problems for themselves"
>
> Ian Livingstone, life president of Eidos

There's certainly a sense talking to people at Sony that creativity will direct how this multifaceted tech and gaming giant approaches the use of Gaikai, whether it's on the PS4 or the systems of the current generation. Hardcore gamers can rest assured that it seems unlikely Sony will adopt a blanket approach or have a lack of innovation. "I think the principal driver is going to be getting that innovation," says Ankers of how he believes Sony will approach using Gaikai and the cloud. "How are we going to use that, how are we going to bring that in?" he says. "And that's where for me the whole industry should be really excited. For us as a business that's just awesome."

Cloud gaming might be this generation's gamble, but if Sony is successful for both itself and for gamers, the sky could be the limit in the next gen.

Right Sony developers stress the need to make experiences that suit the platforms they'll be on.



→ THE POPULAR WEB SERIES MORTAL KOMBAT: LEGACY IS SET TO HAVE A SECOND SEASON →

(BLACK IS BACK)

IS BLACK OPS II CHASING HEADLINES?

As more details emerge from Treyarch's future-set shooter sequel, **games™** chats to the studio about the past and present of gaming's biggest franchise

"As developers and as gamers, we come to a new *Call Of Duty* experience and we say, 'what have we done before?' and, 'what is going to keep people coming back?' " John Rafacz, director of communications at Treyarch, tells games™.

It's a fair point, and one that Activision's *Call Of Duty* franchise is now, in many ways, forced to deal with as it has grown to levels surely even the publisher itself never thought possible. "[With that in mind] the future setting for *Black Ops II* is just a natural manifestation of where the guys wanted to take the game," explains Rafacz. "Coming off the back of *Black Ops*, there were two or three things that were a factor in this. There was the kind of story they wanted to tell, what they wanted to do to push the story forward and there was the creativity and gameplay variety that came out of exploring the Cold War setting.".

It's an area that has long been hinted at in regards to *COD*, right down to rumours suggesting that only Infinity Ward were allowed to take the series in such a direction. *Black Ops II* is, obviously, proof that such gossip was just that, but it hasn't stopped Treyarch from coming under the microscope, especially in terms of trying to get the wider gaming public onboard.

"When you talk about having the experts on our side, and if you're talking about the fans, then yeah, we listen to the experts. Fans will never hesitate to tell you what they want and when you listen to such a diverse set of voices, there are expectations from all of them to deliver that core experience. So in single player terms, you've got this epic storyline with set piece moments but then there's always that demand for innovation and that's where the Strike Force missions come in. The argument was that we were too linear – now we've added non-linearity to the recipe. We are acutely aware of the expectations that people have and the need to make good on the core mechanics that people expect. And we're also acutely aware of some of the places people expect us to push."

A smart design decision, or a developer simply trying to come up with ideas that will convince the audience a fresh experience is ahead? It's tough to tell at this juncture, but it's clear Treyarch feels it has a point to prove, especially given the shift to an environment *Call Of Duty* has yet to tread.

"We did a lot of work with Peter W. Singer [author and one of the leading experts in 21st Century warfare] and we went with the intention of drawing a circle around what 'future' meant" Rafacz goes on. "We wanted to make sure that whatever it was, it was plausible and authentic rather than just laser beams and aliens. When we first sat down with him, we ran him through the weapons, the approach and the storyline we had in mind and asked him 'are we going to far?' But Singer's answer was 'I don't think you're



Below *Black Ops II* features air strikes on American soil by commandeered US aircraft – controversial.

> "The future setting… is just a natural manifestation of where the guys wanted to take the game"
> John Rafacz, Treyarch

CLINT HOCKING TO RECEIVE VALVE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK AS HE JOINS FIRM AFTER HIS LUCASARTS DEPARTURE



Below The original *Black Ops*' Cold War theme included a DLC deathmatch map set in a Cuban hotel/casino.



Above Left *Black Ops II* sends the troops back to the Middle East – a controversial setting given recent history.

going far enough' and that kinda threw us for a bit. It's a balancing act, but 13 years out gives us the benefit of technological advancements that we could play with on a gameplay level."

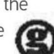
Call Of Duty typifies this 'bigger is better' approach throughout its eight-game run (*Black Ops II* being the ninth entry). The first three WWII-set games took real-life historical scenarios and added a cinematic polish, inspired by the likes of *Saving Private Ryan*, but remained respectful to the era. With a future fiction to invest in, rather than following events that actually took place, it, arguably, frees Treyarch to experiment further with the core experience and, potentially, inject some life into a model that will soon start to show its years.

THE ORIGINAL *BLACK OPS* used the Vietnam War in several key flashback sequences, illustrating the scarred psychiatric state of its protagonist, Alex Mason – imitating the quintessential Vietnam flick, *Apocalypse Now*. Without this historical setting or relevant pop culture touchstone for framing, Treyarch is very much going it alone with *Black Ops II*.

Recent gameplay footage has Alex Mason's son, David, in the heat of battle in LA, circa 2025, witnessing a co-ordinated attack on the Pentagon, Wall Street and Washington. It is, in many people's minds, a controversial move, leaving the question as to whether the franchise can continue to attract this much attention without a few extra eyebrows being raised. Ultimately, it's a battle that is tough to win, especially given the mainstream press and its quick to speculate and accuse attitude. Either way, *Black Ops* has become Treyarch's *Modern Warfare*-like baby.

"I wouldn't think of [*Black Ops*] as a spin-off. It's within the *Call Of Duty* universe. *Call Of Duty* denotes certain expectations that people have – certain experiences and certain gunplay. Coming off the back of *World At War*, Treyarch was interested in exploring new fiction and that's really where *Black Ops* came from – [it's an] opportunity to spread our wings. When you look at the ambition that's present just on the single player front, you're talking about going to places, doing different things and engaging with gameplay in ways that we haven't seen before. And that's without the stuff we haven't talked about yet, and we're strong in those areas too. As a creative professional, it's really more about having the opportunity to put your work, your artistry out there for as many people to enjoy as possible."

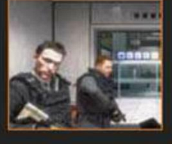
Whether or not Treyarch can live up to this success, especially given the expectation upon it, is the biggest challenge of all.



A History of Violence

→ A selection of the various controversial moments from Call Of Duty and the reaction from incensed newspapers

No Russian



■ "Storm over *Call Of Duty* game that allows players to massacre civilians" **Daily Mail, November 2009**

■ "The real *Call Of Duty*: Terror gangs 'using computer games to plot atrocities securely online' " **Daily Mail, March 2012**

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3



■ "Fury over *Call Of Duty* computer game that features 7/7 Tube bomb-style attacks" **Daily Mail, May 2011**

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare



■ "Norwegian mass killer Breivik played violent video game *Call Of Duty* SIXTEEN hours each day" **Daily Mail, April 2012**

■ "Are we creating a generation of murderers? Shoot 'em ups such as *Call Of Duty* 'train' gamers to shoot real guns – and hit victims in the head" **Daily Mail, May 2012**

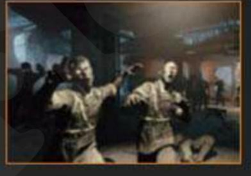
Call Of Duty multiplayer



■ "Islamic extremists use *Call Of Duty* to plan terror attacks," **The Sun, March 2012**

"*Call Of Duty* dad, 46, chokes lad who 'killed' him online" **The Sun, Sep 2011**

Zombie mode



■ "Generation of children are becoming zombies" **Daily Mail, January 2012**





(ANGER MANAGEMENT)

Mass complaint

→ Game developers plead with fans to look at titles objectively

The Internet has given everybody in America a voice. For some reason, everybody decides to use that voice to bitch about movies." So say the immortal words of Ben Affleck in *Jay And Silent Bob Strike Back* in 2001. Eleven years later, following the profound way in which social networking has liberated speech even further, his statement couldn't be much truer, except everyone's bitching about videogames now.

Game fans are more vocal than ever before and completely unafraid to express those opinions, often directly to game developers themselves through Twitter. Some developers take the criticism very well, but others have recently started to show signs of frustration.

In late June, for example, Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime told Kotaku of his disappointment surrounding the hardcore reaction to the Wii U unveiling at E3. "One of the things that, on one hand, I love and, on the other hand, that troubles me tremendously about not only our fanbase but about the gaming community at large is that, whenever you share information, the perspective is, 'Thank you, but I want more'. 'Thank you, but give me more'. I mean, it is insatiable," he told the website.

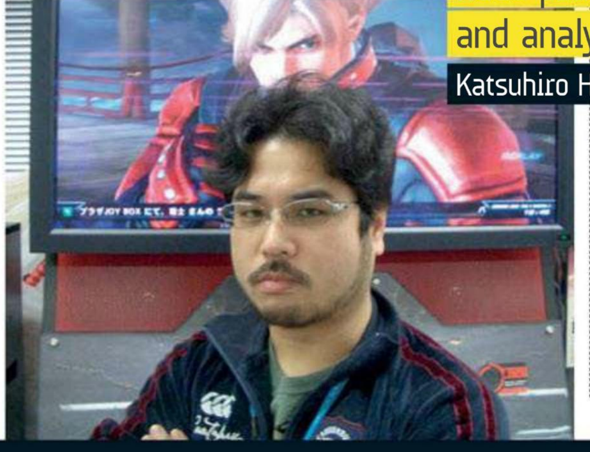
"For years this community has been asking, 'Where's *Pikmin*? Where's *Pikmin*? Where's *Pikmin*?' We give them *Pikmin*. And then they say, 'What else?' For years, this community have said, 'Damnit Reggie, when you launch, you better launch with a *Mario* game'. So we launch with a *Mario* game, and they say, 'So what's more?'" he continued.

Below Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime seems practically annoyed by trying to keep up with the demands of fans.

SIMILARLY, TEKKEN PRODUCER Katsuhiro Harada lost his temper with fans after several of them pestered him on Twitter for not using retro voice samples in *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*. "I believe that, before whining and complaining about everything, you need practice at taking a step back and analysing things objectively. And also at being an adult," he blasted in a public tweet.

Naturally, we decided to catch up with Harada and ask him if videogame fans are becoming harder to please. "Back in the day for *Tekken 1, 2* and even *3*, I think the fighting game player base was more casual. Especially 3D ones," he says. "Now, on the current hardware, we're in the second or even third generation of players because the people in their 20s who were playing those games back in the day are close to 40 now.

> "Before whining and complaining, you need practice at taking a step back and analysing things objectively"
> Katsuhiro Harada, Namco Bandai



Below Katsuhiro Harada is as tough as his *Tekken* characters. He won't be swayed by constant badgering on Twitter.

"In this generation, they're choosing to play fighting games. It's not the cool thing, as it was back in the day. Obviously, because they choose that category, they seem to have a lot of preferences with what they expect from the game. And even the people who have been playing since *1, 2* and *3*, they've been playing so long that they have their own deep and complex preferences that they have. So pleasing these people does seem to be more difficult recently."

→ NEW STUDIO ACTIVISION LEEDS WILL DEVELOP CALL OF DUTY ON ALL HANDHELDS AND A 3DS PITFALL REBOOT

Do gamers have an inflated sense of entitlement?

→ We put the question to **games™** readers for their opinion. Here's what they had to say...

■ "The grumbling over *Left 4 Dead 2*, the *Mass Effect 3* ending, and other fan protests are symptomatic of feeling entitled. On the other side of the coin, as consumers we have rights – to get a fully working product, to get what we pay for and not be exploited."
Merman
games™ forum

■ "I think it's just one of those things developers need to accept. Look at the amount of hate most popular figures get now that there is easier access to be rude to them thanks to social networking."
Big mean bunny
games™ forum

■ "Yes. It's not even a debate."
@angelwhispers_
Twitter

■ "No more so than film fans, TV show fans or fans of any other entertainment media."
@takerdemon
Twitter "N

■ "No, gamers don't. Videogames are a medium that are aimed at the user being able to have power given by the developer to have as much control as possible over the whole experience..."
Mark Wilson
Facebook

■ "If the average NEOGAF poster is anything to go by, then absolutely."
@TRHolmesy
Twitter

■ "The ones who seem to escape the criticism are the ones who stick to their vision and quietly and humbly release their games without any fuss. To hype a game though the teeth; to make promises that you can't deliver and then fail to live up to the hype that you created might get you a lot more initial sales, but it'll get you a hell of a lot of abuse also."
Leeray666
games™ forum

■ "More so than film fans, TV show fans or fans of any other entertainment media."
@takerdemon
Twitter

Furthermore, that fanbase can reach Harada easier than ever before. "If I'm just laying low and being quiet on Twitter, I get maybe 120 tweets or so a day. If I'm answering questions then it's beyond being able to count. [*Street Fighter* producer] Ono-san has a group of people who are quite vulgar in their comments to him while I have a certain group who say the same thing over and over and over again."

IT'S EASY TO see how he might get frustrated. But not every games company is so quick to respond negatively to fan criticism. The reaction to the *Mass Effect 3* ending was so vocal, for example, that BioWare created a whole new additional ending in DLC format. BioWare co-founder Ray Muzyka was moved to write an open letter to fans saying "The journey you undertake in *Mass Effect* provokes an intense range of highly personal emotions in the player; even so, the passionate reaction of some of our most loyal players to the current endings in *Mass Effect 3* is something that has genuinely surprised us", before releasing the *Extended Cut* DLC on 26 June to mostly positive reaction (see page 23).

Is BioWare right to bow to fan pressure in such a way? Was it creatively necessary? Hideo Baba, producer of the *Tales Of* series for Namco Bandai tells us that the new ending to *Mass Effect* is a sign that the creators failed in their original aims. "I think the team release the game as a complete and fixed game," he says. "If the fans say they don't like the ending, the team needs to make more effort in the storyline. If the team make a new ending, that means the team deny themselves..."

Ultimately, BioWare has done itself a lot of favours by responding to its fans in such a way but what are the ramification? Will developers now find themselves in an endless cycle of redoing games and announcements just to keep the complaints at bay? Once again we defer to the wisdom of *Jay And Silent Bob Strike Back*, this time the words of Jason Lee. "That's what the internet is for, slandering others anonymously. Stopping the flick isn't gonna stop that."



Below Fans have demanded *Pikmin 3* for years, but it's easy to see how they'd be left wanting more. Its E3 reveal was hardly a surprise after so much heavy hinting from Shigeru Miyamoto.

→ FURTHER READING

NowGamer.com



■ **NowGamer.com** has a busy August month ahead, fronted by exhaustive coverage from Gamescom in Cologne, featuring interviews with industry luminaries and previews of the biggest upcoming games. It'll also have exclusive launch coverage of *Guild Wars 2*, including the final verdict on the much-anticipated MMO. All this and reviews of THQ's *Darksiders II* and Valve's console port of *Counter-Strike*, alongside the usual wave of high quality gaming news, reviews and previews. You won't need to go anywhere else.

All About Space





■ This month in issue 2 of **All About Space**, you'll discover how humanity's most ambitious mission, the Curiosity rover, might perform the greatest search for life on Mars yet. Inside we've also got twenty mind-blowing facts about the universe, the ten most amazing spacecraft and much more, including the regular Q&A and stargazing sections. Awesome stuff.

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→ DEVIL'S THIRD LOOKING FOR NEW PUBLISHER AFTER THQ TRANSFERRED RIGHTS BACK TO DEVELOPER VALHALLA →

Nintendo Innovation Failure

The erratic decline of the Wii Vitality Sensor's own health

→ Announced in 2009 as Nintendo's next big thing, the Wii Vitality Sensor has still failed to materialize three years later. Here we track the device's fortunes from its awkward birth to presumed death

2 June 2009
VITALITY SENSOR UNVEILED

● LIVE ON stage at E3, Satoru Iwata unveils the Wii Vitality Sensor, a device that can read a user's pulse and "a number of other signals being transmitted by our bodies." He explains: "People will be able to use the product we are developing with this Wii Vitality Sensor to achieve greater relaxation" and that: "Maybe everyone under pressure in our stressful society could use this as a way to relax with the videogame. Traditionally, videogames have been developed to deliver an increased sense of excitement or stimulation but it may not be long before games are also used to let people unwind or even make it easier to fall asleep." No games, or working sensors, were demonstrated.



9 July 2009
BALANCING ACT

● IN AN interview with Fast Company, Nintendo Of America's professional ass-kicker Reggie Fils-Aime defends the Vitality Sensor's unveiling, saying that users should wait to see software before judging it. "Until you have that software, it's tough to understand," he tells N'Gai Croal. "If I told you that you would be standing on an oversized bathroom scale, and having fun doing it, you probably would have said, 'Reggie, I don't get it.' And yet here we are with the Balance Board arguably as the third largest development platform across the globe."

31 July 2009
COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN

● DURING A Financial Results briefing, Satoru Iwata addresses concerns that the E3 unveiling was badly communicated. "Before Wii Fit launched, everyone doubted how well it could sell," he says. "As for Wii Vitality Sensor, I think it will face similar doubts as to whether such a product will sell well in the videogame market. Of course no one can tell how people respond to it before the launch. We understand everyone wants to enjoy a vibrant lifestyle, so I believe if the product could support that desire, it would make a large impact in society. We are hoping to make one such proposal a year, or every two years at best, to try and realise what no one has ever done before. As there was concern at E3 this year that people might misunderstand us as makers developing sequels only, we decided to make the Vitality Sensor public at the media briefing. We would like to deliver the actual product not too late next year."

17 November 2009
PROMISES PROMISES

● IN AN interview with Kotaku, Reggie Fils-Aime says that the Vitality Sensor will be shown again at E3 2010 along with its first software.

17 December 2009
KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

● NINTENDO EUROPE files a trademark for Wii Relax, assumed to be the Wii's first Vitality Sensor software. No other details are given.

12 January 2010
AMERICA'S MOST RELAXED

● NINTENDO US catches up by filing three separate trademarks for Wii Relax including, oddly, a trading card game.



FAR CRY 2 DESIGNER CLINT HOCKING HAS LEFT LUCASARTS AFTER TWO YEARS AT THE DEVELOPMENT STUDIO

15 April 2010 A LINK TO RELAX

IN A GAMES™ interview, Shigeru Miyamoto hints at the hardcore gaming potential of the Vitality Sensor. "Whenever we are going to use any new device it is possible to expand the appeal to those who are new to the videogaming world. At the same time, however, it is also fun to think of ways in which we might apply that new technology to existing forms of gameplay," he muses. "So maybe you might like to ask me to incorporate the Vitality Sensor into Zelda so that as you become more scared, the enemies become even tougher."

29 April 2010 FIRST THIRD-PARTY GAME CONFIRMED?

FRANCE'S OFFICIAL Nintendo magazine reports that Ubisoft is developing Red Steel 3 for Wii and that it will make use of the Vitality Sensor in some way. The rumour is still to be officially confirmed.

14 June 2010 UBISOFT STEPS IN

ON THE first day of E3 2010, Ubisoft reveals Innergy, a "wellness game" for PC and Mac, and the Innergy Sensor, which measures pulse, heart rate variability and blood flow as a means to interact with the game. Innergy may have been of some interest to hardcore gamers – it was partly designed by Rolito, the artist behind Patapon – but the game and sensor both failed to meet their 2011 release date and nothing has been heard of them since the announcement.

15 June 2010 BROKEN PROMISES

DESPITE REGGIE'S claims back in November, neither the Vitality Sensor nor its games are shown at E3. Commentators speculate that the showcase was abandoned at the 11th hour after Ubisoft's unexpected Innergy announcement.

16 June 2010 STRESS TEST

IN AN Investor Relations call, Satoru Iwata explains the Vitality Sensor's conspicuous absence from E3. "Prior to the show, when we put the lineup of titles on the table and asked ourselves, 'Would the Vitality Sensor not get buried under the other titles that were going to be shown?' or, at an event like E3 where it's full of thrills and excitement, and people are very busy, 'Would it be appropriate to ask people who are very busy to come, relax and sit down, and put their finger in the Wii Vitality Sensor and say, 'Okay, now, please relax and calm down'?' We had questions about whether it was the appropriate venue to show this product, so decided to take another opportunity to showcase this product."

7 October 2010 PATENTLY ABSURD

SILICONERA DISCOVERS a Nintendo patent application that reveals how the Wii Vitality Sensor will interact with software. Since a person's blood flow increases under stress, the Vitality Sensor is able to measure that stress by passing infrared light through a person's finger. The less light that passes through, the more blood is in the finger and, therefore, the more stressed the person. The Vitality Sensor's software refers to the level of calmness in a person as 'Relax Fluid', and the goal of each game is to increase the amount of Relax Fluid in the body. One example given is an auto-scrolling flight game in which the player must match their breathing to a tunnel ceiling that rises and falls over time – the aim being to never let the on-screen character touch the ceiling. The Vitality Sensor's ability to monitor pulse is so sensitive that it can tell the difference between the player breathing in or out.

7 June 2011 TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

THE SECOND E3 in a row comes and goes with no showing from the Vitality Sensor. In a press conference that day, Shigeru Miyamoto says that development of the sensor has continued but that the technology still has difficulty with consistent performance across a variety of situations. The designer added that research into sensors continues and that he'd like to release something like the Vitality Sensor someday.

1 November 2011 SONY HAS A BRAIN WAVE

SILICONERA DISCOVERS a Sony patent for Vita, DualShock and Move style controllers that register biometric data through touch alone. The technology is said to register heart rate, skin moisture and muscle movement to create new forms of interactivity. Among Sony's examples of potential uses for the hardware are a sniper game that would make a rifle shake depending on how nervous you are, and a combat game where you can defend by tensing hand muscles.

17 April 2012 INNERGY REAPPEARS



FRENCH DEVELOPER Exoa announces that it has completed its work on Ubisoft's Innergy, long after everyone had assumed it was cancelled, and says that the game will be released in 2013. Is this the final nail in the coffin for the Vitality Sensor or a ray of hope that such projects can be completed?

8 May 2012 JOULE RUMOURED

A VITALITY Sensor-like device called Joule is rumoured for Xbox 360 and touted to be shown at E3 2012. It never was...

6 June 2012 VITALITY SENSOR FLATLINES

NINTENDO'S E3 2012 conference comes and goes without a hint of Vitality Sensor's fate. With Wii U superseding Wii, our assumption is that it's dead.


LITTLE KING'S STORY DESIGNER YOSHIRO KIMURA HAS OPENED A NEW STUDIO NAMED ONION GAMES




■ Expect a much larger fascimile of LA in *GTA V* than we saw in *GTA: San Andreas*.

■ While Rockstar has yet to confirm it, a leaked report suggests Albert de Silva – an ex member of the Mob – will star as the protagonist.

■ November's trailer debut suggests a lighter tone to *GTA V*. Fans are hoping for the return of jetpacks.

■ According to a leaked report, *GTA V* will feature a working criminal economy, where players can buy and sell drugs, cars and weapons.

GERMAN CENSOR PASSES GEARS OF WAR 3 UNCUT AFTER BANNING THE FIRST TWO GAMES IN THE SERIES



(GTA V IN 2013?)

GTA V in 2013?

→With barely a sliver of information since Rockstar unveiled the trailer late last year, is Grand Theft Auto V in trouble?

The secrecy, anticipation and ambiguity surrounding the release of any new Rockstar game have always been part of the illustrious studio's inimitable enigmatic charm. However, while protracted development windows and shifting release dates make for forgivable collateral on previous Rockstar titles such as *LA Noire*, *Red Dead Redemption* and *Max Payne 3*, fans are growing increasingly impatient with the lack of information regarding the next eagerly awaited instalment in the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise.

Rockstar announced *GTA V* via Twitter in October 2011, followed in turn by a trailer that confirmed the game setting as Los Santos, also alluding to themes surrounding the economic crisis and the excess living of the privileged. Suffice to say, it was enough to send anticipation levels through the roof and the internet was inevitably rife with supposition. While the ensuing torrent of rumours, speculation and misleading hoaxes hardly came as a surprise, the ensuring deathly silence from Rockstar itself has been patently disquieting to the fanbase.

"What is going on with *GTA V*?" asked one eager fan on Rockstar's official website during a community Q&A session in July. "Why don't you give us more news?" enquired another perturbed user. "We are very busy working on the game!" Rockstar replied initially, before posting a longer riposte. "As we have said before, we have often had long gaps between asset releases on previous games and will continue to do so in the future."

Alongside the community dialogue, the studio released two new screenshots that illustrate the immense detail of the landscape of Los Santos (based on LA) and the surrounding Californian beaches and wilderness. However, this minor update has only exacerbated fears that Rockstar might be enduring a turbulent development on – let's face it – one of the most anticipated sequels of all time. It could be that these immaterial and disappointing new images represent a developer stalling for time.

ACCORDING TO REPORTS, the developer has significantly overhauled major aspects of its propriety engine RAGE (Rockstar Advanced Game Engine) to accommodate the massive scale of the sequel. It's unsurprising given that even a cursory glance at the two newly released screenshots effectively showcases how ambitious the project is – it's touted as the biggest *GTA* to date, with a larger map, more in-depth mechanics and social features (*Max Payne 3*'s Crews will transition to *GTA V*).

Faux Pas

→Rockstar addresses the GTA V leaks

■ DURING ROCKSTAR'S community Q&A, the studio responded to a question about the slew of supposed leaked footage and story details:

"Now that we've announced *GTA V*, all the way up until game launch (and probably beyond), there is going to be no shortage of non-stop hoaxes, faked footage and screens, rampant rumours and speculation. As a rule, we are not going to get into the game of confirming or denying each of these as they happen as there is simply too much of it. Half of them we don't even understand... Instead, we'll leave it to fans like yourselves to decide what's legit and what's phony. Please assume if you don't hear it here, it is probably mostly fakes and almost definitely not the complete truth."

A 2012 release is all but confirmed as off the cards, with the title conspicuously absent from both E3 and Gamescom this year. While some analysts have pointed to a May 2013 release (that would follow a recent Rockstar release tradition, set by *GTA IV*), it's highly plausible that the game could slip further back on the calendar.

"We are sorry if you find this frustrating," Rockstar empathised during the fan Q&A, "but please understand, we don't do this because we 'don't care about our fans', 'don't respect our fans', 'hate GTA fans etc' – precisely the opposite! We do it because we want to make sure we only release 100 per cent correct information, and because we want to keep plenty back for the actual game release so there are still lots of surprises when you play it.

"The only things we care about are that you enjoy the experience of actually playing the game and that we release accurate information," the post continued. "We just have not been in a position to show more of the game than the trailer and will not be for a while yet."

Those last few words will be a particularly sore point for fans. It seems unlikely that any new information related to the game will be released until the tail end of 2012 (most likely to divert attention away from the holiday season's big releases). There's no doubt that Rockstar operates in its own mysterious ways and it will be quite some time before we're any clearer on whether the studio's ambition has paid off. For now, we'll just have to make do with supposition, rumours and other supposed leaks until Rockstar fully pulls back the curtain on its grand opus.



“We just have not been in a position to show more of the game than the trailer and will not be for a while yet”
Rockstar





→ ACCORDING TO MICROSOFT, REPORTS THAT THE COMPANY WILL LAUNCH XBOX MUSIC IN AUTUMN ARE FALSE →

#TRENDING
with NowGamer.com's Nick Jones



Sony Buys Gaikai: How Lessons Learned In Its Past Will Save Sony's Future



It began back in late 2011 when Sony sold its share of SLCD Corp to partner Samsung. Then came the unification of Sony's digital media services under one banner, the Sony Entertainment Network. In February, it continued with the buyout of Ericsson and the creation of Sony Mobile.

Then, in recent weeks, we've seen Sony purchase the publishing arm of EMI, making it the biggest player in music; there was the deal with Panasonic to jointly produce OLED screens which could see Sony re-establish itself as a leading producer of TVs; and, finally, the Gaikai purchase which has, pretty much overnight, made Sony the world's leading provider of streaming videogames content. Not so bad...

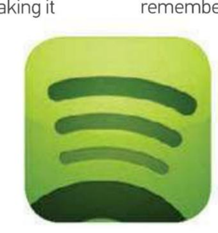
There's a clear strategy emerging from Sony's recently installed CEO, and former head of PlayStation, Kaz Harai: one of hardware consolidation and software expansion. It's a strategy that has its roots in the company's Betamax debacle in the early Eighties.

Sony's reaction to losing the home video format war to VHS and its superior library of movies was daring to say the least: it bought Columbia and CBS. Lesson learnt: never again would a Sony product fail because of a lack of world-class movies and music.

Well, that was the theory, at least.

In recent years the game changed and Sony was left behind. Music delivery migrated from physical to digital with iPod and iTunes but Sony didn't seem to notice what was happening and it stuck rigidly to its physical media: flash memory and not MiniDisc was the future.

Unlike where the success of the Game Boy ultimately resulted in the PlayStation, Sony was late to react to the threat of the iPod. The iPod could and maybe should have been a Sony product; it's the natural successor to the still remembered Walkman.









> Sony was late to react to the threat of the iPod. The iPod could and maybe should have been a Sony product; it's the natural successor to the Walkman.

While Sony was playing catch up, Apple was bringing products like the iPhone and iPad to market, its App Store the vessel for exclusive content distribution, providing its owner with a nice 30 per cent cut of every single sale. Apple has taken Sony's place as electronics innovator, added some savvy business nous and, in the process, become the world's most valuable company. Meanwhile, Sony's share value today is one-sixth of its value in 2000, when the PS2 launched.

So here we are today. As faster broadband enables movies – and tantalisingly games – to go where music did ten years ago, Sony is, again, in danger of missing the boat.

Digital delivery companies like Spotify and Netflix have shown the way – even Apple could learn a thing or two from the subscription-based, streaming-media model employed by these market leaders. Sony has certainly taken note.

Gaikai opens up a world of possibilities both short and long term. Right now, it'll help spread the PlayStation format to multiple outlets, but in the future, it could well turn out to be a key component in PlayStation 4.

Exclusivity is only likely to harm its potential profitability and open the door for a competitor, like OnLive or even Microsoft, to come in and beat Sony at its own game.

So don't be surprised to see the Gaikai-powered PlayStation app turning up on LG and Samsung smart TVs as well as Bravias. A PlayStation app appearing on the next Xbox might be pushing it a bit, but the more outlets Sony can sell its software on, the more money it can make. After all, Sony's Music Unlimited app recently made its iPhone debut so the precedent has already been made.

In many respects it's reminiscent of the video wars of the Eighties but instead of VHS or Betamax, the formats are the providers that serve up this content, be it Netflix or LoveFilm, Spotify or Xbox Music, PlayStation, Gaikai or Steam. And because these apps don't require a £300 hardware investment, it's easy to switch from one provider to another. It's even more important therefore that the content is exclusive, an area in which Sony excels in.

What Sony is doing right now is almost like a return to those days when it had the balls to just go out and buy Columbia. It clearly recognises the importance of content once again, and, more importantly, recognises that this content must exploit the convenience of internet delivery.

But it's probably not about how that strategy affects PlayStation 4 or the next generation of Bravia TVs. It's about how Sony views the future of the company as a content delivery provider, both in terms of hardware and software working together. Because without getting both sides of that equation right, Sony probably doesn't even have a future.

Nick Jones is Editor in Chief of





Project X Zone

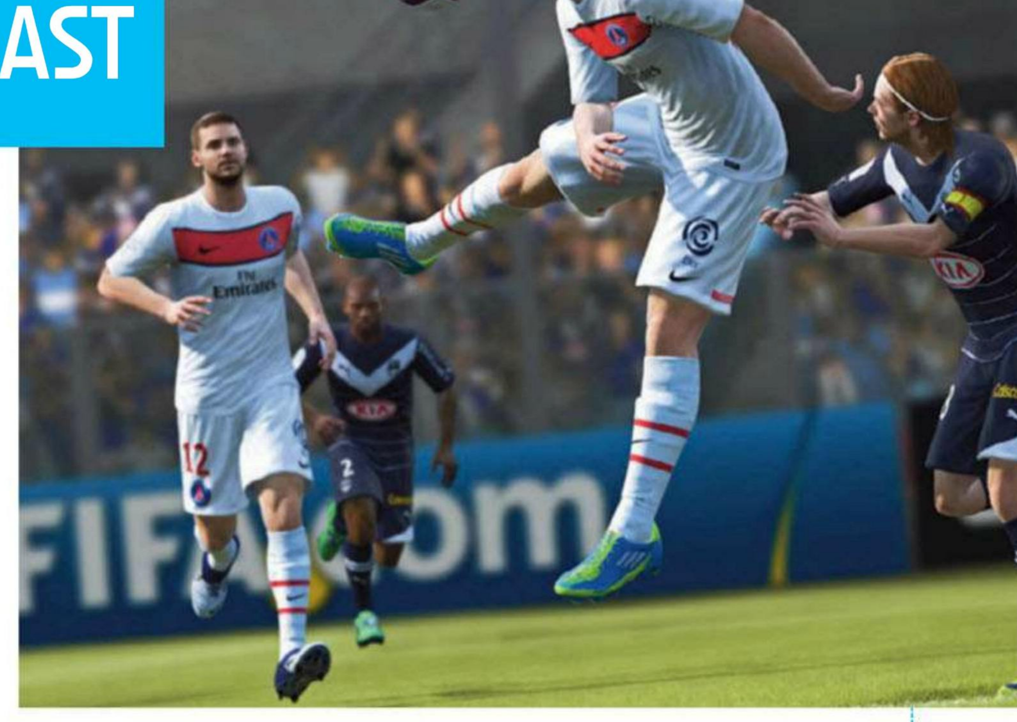
→ Sega vs Capcom vs Namco Bandai – A fanboy's dream come true

It seems the modern era of gaming has no fear in bringing together famous icons from different universes. Mario and Sonic are now considered firm friends, *Tekken* and *Street Fighter* are more than comfortable invading each other's space and now in 2012, Namco Bandai has somehow convinced everyone to forget about the idea of IP exclusivity. The announcement of *Project X Zone*, developed by *Xenosaga* studio Monolith Soft, sees the aforementioned publisher, Sega and Capcom team up to create a tactical RPG for the 3DS. Although the game's core won't necessarily revolutionise the role-playing genre, the appeal is that it contains over 200 characters that will be instantly recognisable to most. Be that Jin Kazama from *Tekken*, Ryu from *Street Fighter*, Mega Man from, well, *Mega Man* or Ulala from *Space Channel 5*, Namco's desire for a "dream crossover" seems well on its way to being realised. Anyone expecting a, say, *Mass Effect* experience with such legendary figures need think again, however. Based on foundations that have made strategy JRPGs a success in the past, this is lightning quick with a firm focus on combat and party attacks. To many, though, this is all they could have hoped for and more.

More information, and the game's first few trailers, can be seen at http://pxz.channel.or.jp/

COAST TO COAST

with Gray Nicholson



Sometimes the best team wins the cup; sometimes favouritism gets in the way



***Consumer Reports* is a bit like *Which?* back home, a non-profit watchdog looking out for the shopper, reporting on products impartially, without compromising advertising deals from the companies it covers.** It is old and respected; imagine Morgan Freeman advising you on washing machines. Its digital offshoot, the Consumerist website, reports daily on injustices facing buyers, from FedEx drivers lobbing TVs over fences to cable companies sneaking risible hidden charges onto bills. Each year the Consumerist polls its members on which is the worst company in America. Electronic Arts took home the title this year.

Bear in mind that we have drugs companies charging thousands of dollars for pills not only rich people need. We have energy companies turning drinking water flammable by pumping chemicals into the ground to flush out gas – watch *Gasland*. We have companies profiting from overseas slavery. The majority of votes went to EA.

Surprising, isn't it? Many Consumerist regulars, generally an older crowd, were surprised too, accusing a whiny cabal of gamers of organising en masse to sway the vote over more deserving bastards, like runner-up Bank of America, which participated in the global financial meltdown that almost destabilised society into burning cannibalistic hell. Indeed, that's likely how it was done, but the result remains relevant; a group was outraged, got organised and made their voices heard through a vote. Democracy!

The result remains relevant; a group was outraged, got organised and made their voices heard through a vote. Democracy!

After the surprise, I had to admit that I haven't felt the greatest love for the player permeating the dead-end menu screens and stifling impositions found in games from the company. More like a grudging tolerance.

Gamers' backs go up right away, when they must 'sign' a contract to be permitted to play an EA game, and, the aggrieved say, this sense of imbalance or condescension continues through the whole product, from the 'anti-consumer' invention of the online pass, that makes access to even a legitimate, new game feel tenuous, to the servers that EA insists on running itself yet, if you listen to hardcore users, is unable to do so satisfactorily. Certainly, some days it seems if the humidity changes in the room, or a bird lands outside, you will be squirted out of the EA servers into the maddening fog of not-quite-online, gritting your teeth to the buzzsaw din of EA Trax trying to sell you new music.

Even tremulous servers of this calibre cannot be acquired infinitely, and so we encounter sad, quiet announcements of older games being shut down, snuffed out when it's no longer commercially viable to provide the rack space. These occasions are little deaths, mini bereavements, eroding gaming history. This loss matters to people, even if it's only the idea rather than the practical inconvenience.

Some of the wronged, glad for this rare spotlight on the issues troubling them, questioned game-breaking exploits, such as goosed player attributes in *FIFA Soccer*, lingering unacknowledged for so long, and expressed the impotence of no available recourse, having already paid. Further, that a litany of vital bug fixes that would normally be free were held back to be released each year – as boxed sequels.

If you've ever struggled to overcome a bug, new or annually inherited, in one of these games, and sought answers in the associated family of glaring, bloated websites that are like broken pub quiz machines, you know the ire that drove people to vote that day.

The most poignant objections came from those who'd seen their favourite games and developers – quirky, bright and individual, like gourmet cupcakes – bought up and blankly consumed by the giant company, resurfacing mangled, if at all. One wonders if there will come a point where gamers, an impatient, impulsive lot, will care enough about such things to forego the latest attractive mega-release, voting with their wallets instead of their computer mice.

Gray Nicholson is a former videogames journalist who now resides in America, acknowledging his roots as he sees fit



Mass Effect 3: Extended Edition

→ After the discordant reaction to the ambiguity surrounding the final moment of *Mass Effect 3*, BioWare responded with a free DLC drop that offered a more satisfying denouement to the trilogy. games™ readers share their thoughts...

■ "One of the things that I liked about the first ending was the ambiguity, which lead to all sorts of wild theories online. *The Extended Cut* took away the majority of that mystery. But on the whole, I think the extended cut was a better overall ending."
Rotek, games™ forum

■ "A great ending, which should have been the original in the first place. When investing over 100 hours into a trilogy of games, I shouldn't have to use my imagination too much with an ending. The original was far too wishy-washy and vague."
richhoyle24, games™ forum

■ "Delivered exactly what it was meant to - cleared up plot holes and expanded on info without changing what each ending actually meant."
Nick Atkins (@TweekeewT), Twitter

■ "The reworked endings fixed the major problems I had with the original ones. Plus had a great remix of *An End Once And For All*."
Chris Eason (@Legoftime), Twitter

■ "I think that it fixed a lot of the issues that were present in *Mass Effect 3*'s ending. However, I don't think I'll ever play the trilogy again with a different Shepard; my romance with Tali and bromance with Garrus was too good for me to ruin with an evil Shepard in a second playthrough."
Callum Patterson, Facebook

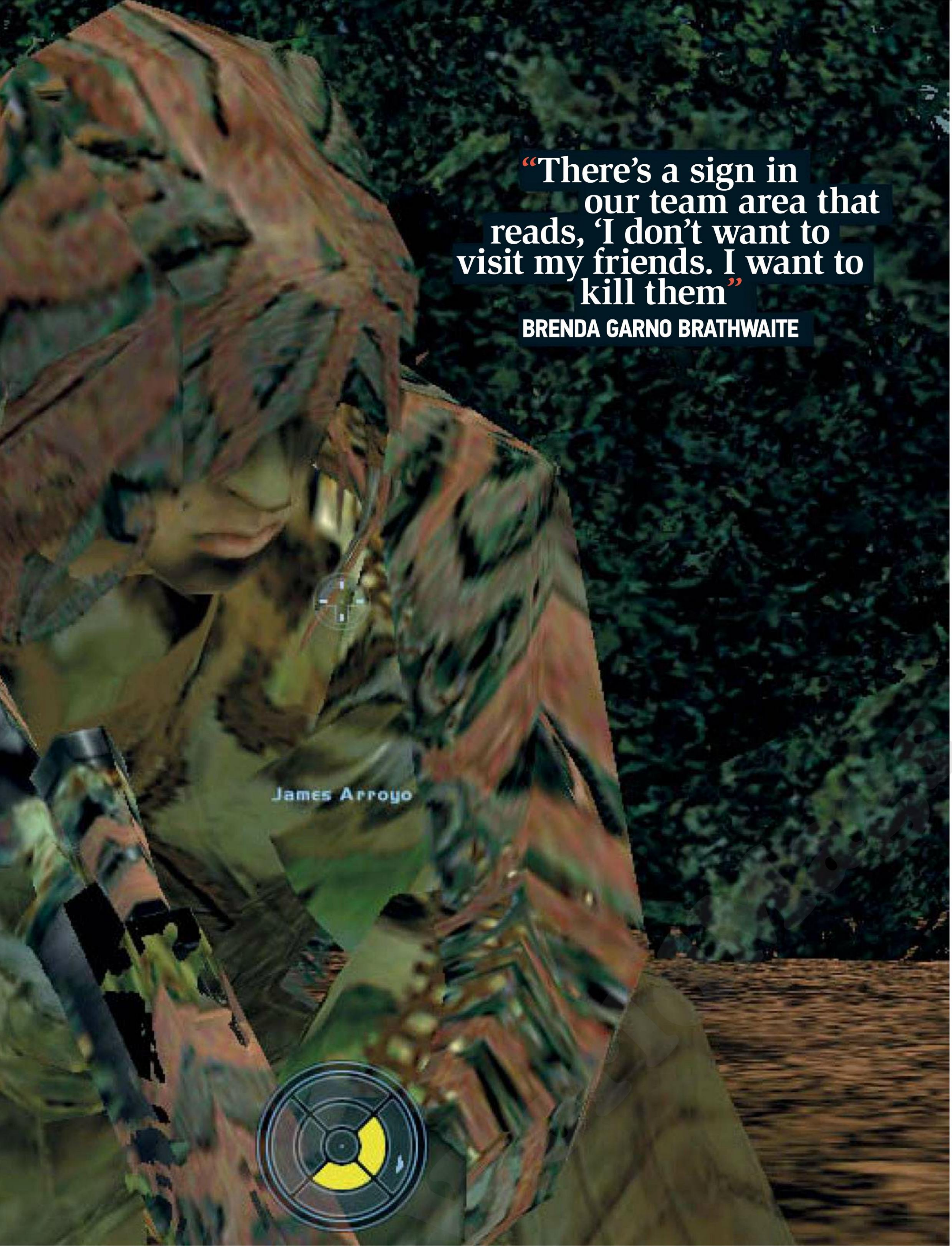


WHY I ♥…

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

BRENDA GARNO BRATHWAITE, LOOT DROP

"Not surprisingly, and I said this in the press well before we got the gig to do [Facebook game] Ghost Recon: Commander, my favourite game is the original Ghost Recon, designed by Brian Upton. I am aware of what GR players want because I am a long-time Ghost Recon fan. I have literally logged hundreds of hours of play in those games. Knowing that Ghost Recon fans were expecting a more hardcore and extensible experience, I wanted to deliver that. There's a sign in our team area that reads, 'I don't want to visit my friends. I want to kill them.' I've enjoyed all the Ghost Recon games, but I regularly go back to the original and its two expansions."



"There's a sign in our team area that reads, 'I don't want to visit my friends. I want to kill them'"

BRENDA GARNO BRATHWAITE


HALO 4:
FORGING
A NEW
RING

343 Industries' Frank O'Connor talks about the risks, and potential rewards, of the most ambitious Halo game yet

games™: Given the task ahead of and given to 343, there must have been huge internal pressures on the team and, obviously, some serious risks you knew you were going to have to take…

Frank O'Connor: The number one challenge was obvious: we had to make sure we made a *Halo* game that was at least up to the standard of what had come before it. Now that's [exacerbated] as we're building a new team simultaneously as we're prototyping and building what we think the project needs to look like and realising that we have to take it forward. It's not going to be enough to have a game that's as good as the last *Halo* game or as inventive as the last *Halo* game. We have to do more because all of the *Halo* games before that had always done more. We have to, at least, follow that trajectory.

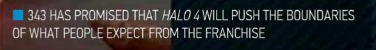
I think in some ways you can look at the project and say if you guys made a game that was as good as *Reach* or *3*, just in terms of quality, that would be a pretty Herculean task and I wouldn't have even have liked committing to that verbally over these last two years. I'd have played it safe and said we're just going to try our best and had some humility. I think it's funny when a lot of people have a sense of false humility and then don't actually produce something that's as good as the humility they were using [laughs]. But this was real humility, and this was real terror, and there was definitely a point for me where we were about halfway through the development cycle and we had things starting to show up on screen… I mean the rendering engine is a really good example because it's somewhere we've added our own stamp technologically and adds objective fidelity to the game – I don't have to be humble about saying there's more pixels on the screen because there are more pixels on the screen [laughs]. The thing we have to be careful about is do the fans think those pixels are adequately representing the universe and are they adding to it.

GTM: So have you had to go back through previous development cycles and decided what has worked, what didn't and ruthlessly eradicate some elements to ensure that *Halo 4* stands out on its own?

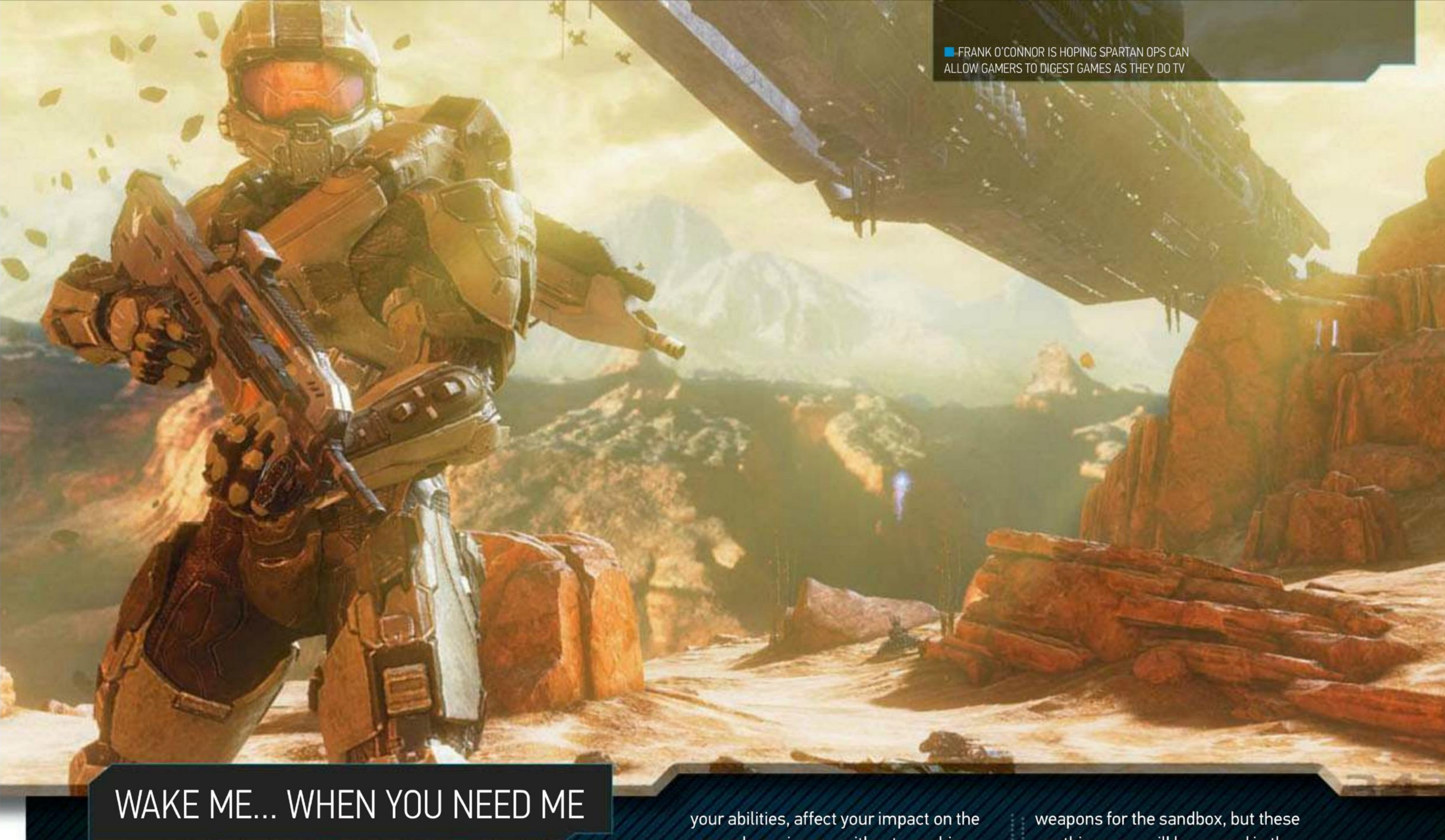
I worked at Bungie for a long time – since *Halo 2* – and the process was the exactly the same. I've only really ever worked for one developer, albeit for a really long time, and then 343; so that process, as far as I'm concerned, is what happens at every developer [laughs]. You're working on an extended franchise and there's this tension about what we leave in that's core to the experience and what do we add. The terrifying one is eliminating things because inevitably people will be vocal about how much they loved them and just expect it. It's a part of the editing process… put it this way: we wouldn't remove something because it was unpopular or we didn't like it. We would only take something out if we needed to balance something at another point of the game or there was technical problems so, yeah, taking things out is always the scariest thing. When you're adding things, I don't think the problem is adding them – it's building good things to begin with which are all like mini projects. A single gun, for example, let's take the Scattershot. We need to look at how it works with the sandbox, what does it mean to the multiplayer balance and how does it work in the campaign.

GTM: *Halo* has always been an inspiration for many games, but the landscape has changed drastically over the last few years. Do you feel it's necessary to meticulously keep an eye on these, and how do they influence your project?

They come from all over the place and some are always going to have a bigger impact than others. I'll be honest, they tend to come socially rather than at a management level. For example, we don't come into a meeting and say to management, 'Hey, you know what's hot? *Borderlands 2* and it has a cool progression system.' That's what we talk about over lunch or stuff that the artists are absorbing or the designers are playing. The reality of that social space is that our staff plays and experiences such a wide variety of things and I'd love to be able to pick a couple of specific examples… I mean, obviously, we've gone through the grinder a little bit on *Call Of Duty*, but that's not really an appropriate comparison, but we look at trends as a whole and the palette of the games that are out there. There are specific things like, for example, user progression and Bungie had started doing that with *Halo 3* and way more with *Halo: Reach*, but still hadn't pushed it into a career progression system that affects your gameplay because that's scary – it really is. You want to be careful, so we started working with a career progression system that wouldn't affect the multiplayer balance and would have more of an effect on how an individual plays rather than how that individual either poisoned or glorified the well of other players. And that's what you have to worry about in relation to competitive FPS: there needs to be an even playing field for everyone, so how do you make changes to gameplay that affect



343 HAS PROMISED THAT *HALO 4* WILL PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT PEOPLE EXPECT FROM THE FRANCHISE


FRANK O'CONNOR IS HOPING SPARTAN OPS CAN ALLOW GAMERS TO DIGEST GAMES AS THEY DO TV

WAKE ME... WHEN YOU NEED ME

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MASTER CHIEF

100,000 BCE: Forerunners create the Halo rings to destroy an alien race known as The Flood.

2170-2517AD: A unified government known as the UNSC has been formed, and an army of supersoldiers – Spartans – created to restore order. One is John-117.

2524 AD: While searching for Forerunner artefacts, the Covenant makes first contact with the human race, devastating the colony of Harvest and starting a war.

2552 AD: The Covenant wipes out the planet Reach, with Noble Team sacrificing their lives in order for the Pillar of Autumn to escape.

2552 AD: The events of *Halo: Combat Evolved* take place with the awakening of the Master Chief and the destruction of the first Halo.

2552 AD: A Covenant civil war between the Brutes and Elites forms the backdrop for *Halo 2* as the Chief discovers the Halo rings can be fired by accessing the Ark on Earth.

2552 AD: *Halo 3* sees the end of the Covenant/Human war as the Master Chief saves the day. Not before being declared MIA with Cortana.

2553 AD: Peace with the Covenant proves fragile as relationships between the two races appear strained, hinting at the struggles that could be faced in *Halo 4*.

your abilities, affect your impact on the gameplay universe, without wrecking the balance of the game, and that was tricky. We didn't find a specific way to do that, but it was more about philosophy and tuning your player for them to play the way you want and not necessarily changing your player to make them much more powerful. It's more about giving you sweeter tools to play the way you'd like – more like tuning an engine, if that makes sense.

So where is the career progression system sitting at the moment?

There's some elements we're going to start talking about fairly soon, because the honest answer is they're coming in hot. At the moment there's still specific pieces that may get cut, may get tuned and may get changed because these are the last parts. We've been tuning and testing this stuff for literally three years, starting on paper – not any code or in people's hands – and we'll continue to sharpen that right up to the day we launch. It's fairly simple. A really good thing for people to think about in terms of comparison is *Gradius*. Now, just before you start the game you're able to pick a loadout of weapons that essentially did the same thing but did them in different ways. In my head, because I'm very old [laughs], that's a comparison I like to think about because, basically, what our progression system does, it opens up more and more of those. So you're not actually opening up completely new weapons for the sandbox, but these are things you will have used in the campaign, these things that you'll be able to use in various multiplayer or custom modes off the bat. If you want to try the DMR on day one, it's easy to find a playlist where DMRs are part of your loadout, or you can just go to a custom game and make sure that's part of your loadout. Now, when you go to the pool of game types, like Infinity Flare, your progression system will have enabled different aspects of those loadouts so you can pick exactly what you want, and this goes for multiplayer and Spartan Ops. So, one of the loadouts I like for Spartan Ops in particular is DMR, which is kind of like a pinpoint precision rifle, and the battle rifle as they're really good for fighting crawlers, which are some of the new bad guys. They're both rifles so it seems like a bit of a redundancy, but I know I'm going to come up against crawlers a lot so I'll need that slightly different behaviour from the battle rifle that I wouldn't get from the DMR. The crawlers are basically moving too fast for an old fart like me to actually hit them in the mouth so I need the battle rifle with its burst shots so if I just miss, one of the bullets might go on. That's kind of how it works and we open up those loadouts and the ingredients for those loadouts and there's one other aspect of the game that we're not talking about just yet that we're opening up to players – that's going to be pretty interesting. Again, though, it's about tuning and, of course, the aesthetic stuff and the personification



VISUAL FIDELITY HAS BECOME A STICKING POINT FOR 343 INDUSTRIES TO ADD A NEW SHEEN TO *HALO*

of your character in this universe, which is a little bit better now as we've added a fictional context so you're not just making your character look cool and badass, which is usually 90 per cent of the reason. The other 10 per cent is you're creating a real character who is going to be in the Spartan Ops fiction. He's not going to say a lot – he's more of a passive observer – but he's going to feel grounded in that fiction as you built him from the ground up.

Is it the same for perks and armour abilities?

Most of them are going to be available in the same way, so if you're playing Team Sniper you don't have to unlock a sniper rifle to play it. But there's going to be certain progression: key modes where you will start off with a limited palette and you're going to be grinding, as it were. The nice thing about it is you don't have to do that if that progression thing isn't your cup of tea.

You mentioned Spartan Ops a few times, and it's arguably the biggest shift you're bringing to *Halo*. Why is it important to the franchise, and how do you think it'll affect gaming as a whole going forward?

I'm a big story fan and I'm a big campaign fan, but more than that, I have a busy life so when I get home I'm playing *Halo: Reach*. I'll play that for, say, an hour, but I don't play Campaign like that because I want to digest that at a different pace. So Spartan Ops is nice for me because, you know, you have

> "One of the things in [Halo 4]: relationships and people, but all on this giant sci-fi canvas"

these missions with a meaningful story and real characters – things happen but the missions are quite short: 15 minutes, maybe 20 if it's a tough one. It's a little, digestible chunk and that's how I digest TV too. I will forget to watch something for three or four weeks, and then just watch three *Games Of Thrones* in one sitting. Not only does it let me experience this stuff episodically, but it lets me take that story back into work, that social sphere where you can talk about fiction, like *Lost* or *Game Of Thrones*. That's the experience you get and that's what we set out to do. We wanted people to have this social experience as they co-operate with each other to get through the mission, and then this social experience of sharing the story. You don't do that with Campaign. With Campaign you share the big ticker items after the fact. You don't talk about the linear fiction in the way you do with a *Game Of Thrones*.

In many ways *Halo* hits the reset button in terms of narrative, but there's still a very intimidating amount of information out there. How are you going to ensure this isn't lost but still pushes the series forward?

That's one of the hardest things with games in general because they're made by people who already get those things: they get sci-fi, they get the baroque universe-building exercises we go through – they are the audience. So initially there wasn't much competition to do better and better storytelling or to get to that Hollywood level – it was all about fidelity and how good does our [interactive computer graphics] look. I think that mainstream viewers have been exposed more and more to that stuff recently so we've kind reached the nexus of people being able to digest sci-fi. Things like *Battlestar Galactica*, which has a huge female audience but it's still hard sci-fi, but it's hard sci-fi that focuses on character and people so that's one of the things that's in [*Halo 4*]: relationships and people, but all on this giant sci-fi canvas. It's not so much all the things we've done, it's partly about how the audience has shifted back to genre fiction anyway – which is, obviously, very convenient for us. We still need to make sure we're telling real stories, though, with real characters, so that's one of the big things for us.

In terms of gameplay, *Halo* has always been pretty approachable because of the sandbox gameplay. If you're not very good at placing shots, there's other ways for you to approach it. In terms of gameplay, this is still very much classic *Halo* campaign when we're talking about the moment-to-moment shooting or the exploring. In terms of story, it's definitely a big shift, and with graphic fidelity – we've spent far more money, so that's going to help.



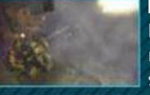


RECENTLY CONFIRMED BY MICROSOFT, THE LIMITED EDITION *HALO 4* XBOX 360 COMES WITH A 320GB HARD DRIVE AND EVEN MAKES NOISES THAT RELATE TO THE FRANCHISE. AWESOME...

THEY OWE IT TO HALO

4 GAMES THAT WOULD HAVE NEVER EXISTED WITHOUT BUNGIE'S FPS

4 – CALL OF DUTY



Infinity Ward knew how to make first-person shooters. *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, developed by 2015, Inc., the team that would eventually transition over to *COD*, was well established before *Halo* was on the scene. It wasn't until *Halo*'s approach to console FPSing that all of a sudden these companies were able to apply the nuances from the genre away from the PC. If it weren't for Bungie, the behemoth we know today may never have come to pass.

3 – BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT



Thanks to its outstanding co-op and competitive play, with huge wars fought between massive armies, *Battlefield* remained a jewel in PC gaming's crown with *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* in 2006. Two years earlier, though, *Halo 2* sparked an obsession with multiplayer, and Xbox Live, proving that team deathmatch had the potential to be even bigger on the console. Cue DICE's interest in trying to take a piece of that pie.

2 – METROID PRIME



Metroid was not a game known for being in the first-person, making a name for itself from a sideways viewpoint. Retro Studios toyed with the FPS concept in 2002 when *Metroid Prime* was released with the world viewed through the eyes of Samus Aran. A year after *Halo* had changed the world, it could be argued that Nintendo felt it needed a game-changing FPS of its own, deciding to grant that honour to a mascot who had a proven track record of success.

1 – KILLZONE



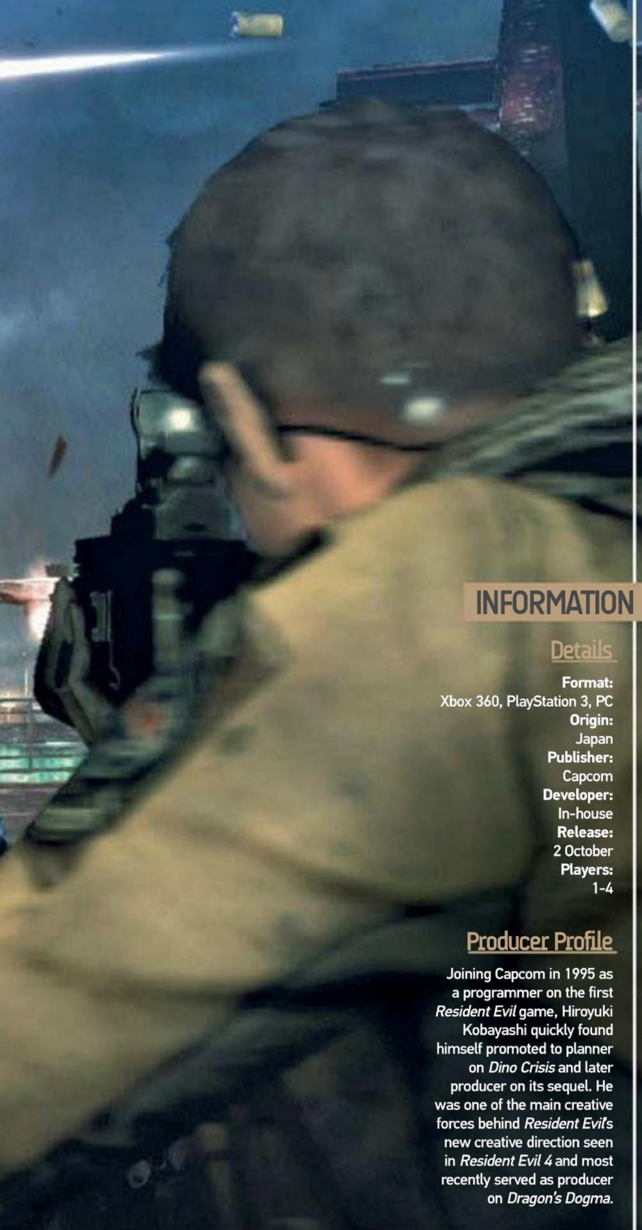
Sony certainly needed a '*Halo*' for the PlayStation 3. With Microsoft always ready to fall back on the Chief to spark a sense of intrigue and anticipation, Sony craved something similar. The answer was *Killzone*, a game where the similarities to *Halo* were obvious. The sci-fi setting, a recharging health system, a realistic weapons inventory. If Gorilla had managed to replicate the popularity of the Master Chief, the war between the two could have been very different.

PREVIEWS CONTENTS

Chris's sequences evoke the same adrenaline-fuelled action of *Resident Evil 5*. It's likely to prove as divisive to fans as the last entry in the franchise.

Inset: You can't have a modern third-person action game without a cool running away/into camera sequence.

Inset: Much like in *RE3: Nemesis*, prepare to spend the majority of Jake and Sherry's campaign in perpetual fear that Ustanak might just be waiting around every corner, ready to attack.



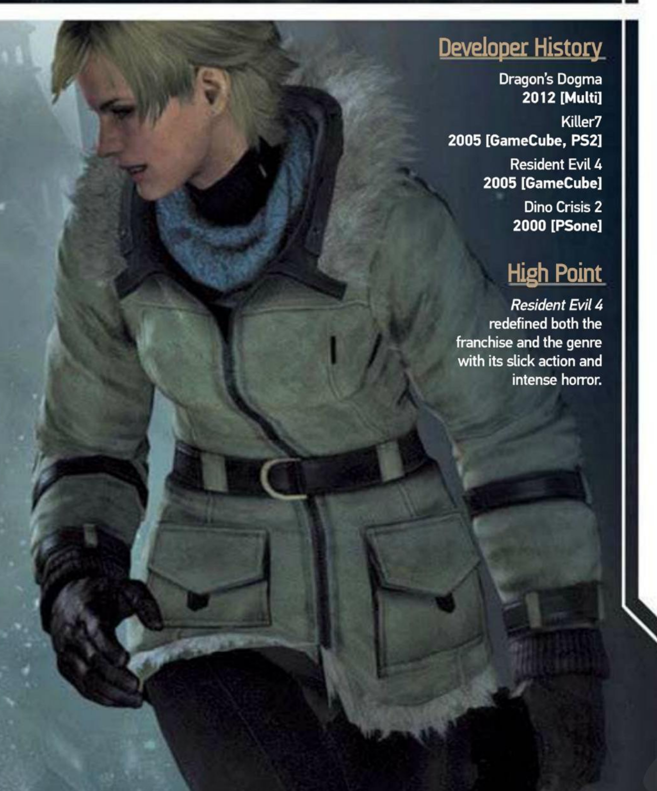
INFORMATION

Details

Format:
Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC
Origin:
Japan
Publisher:
Capcom
Developer:
In-house
Release:
2 October
Players:
1-4

Producer Profile

Joining Capcom in 1995 as a programmer on the first *Resident Evil* game, Hiroyuki Kobayashi quickly found himself promoted to planner on *Dino Crisis* and later producer on its sequel. He was one of the main creative forces behind *Resident Evil*'s new creative direction seen in *Resident Evil 4* and most recently served as producer on *Dragon's Dogma*.



Developer History

Dragon's Dogma
2012 [Multi]
Killer7
2005 [GameCube, PS2]
Resident Evil 4
2005 [GameCube]
Dino Crisis 2
2000 [PSone]

High Point

Resident Evil 4 redefined both the franchise and the genre with its slick action and intense horror.

Resident Evil 6

CONCEPT Three distinct campaigns. Six characters. 40+ hours of gameplay. It's the most ambitious entry in the *Resident Evil* series to date.

With three campaigns and some classic influences, Resident Evil 6 attempts to find safety in numbers

The question is: where to start? We imagine players will linger ponderously over this little quandary as *Resident Evil 6* illuminates their television screens for the first time come October, presenting them with three names and not a lot of guidance. It's also a question applicable for any discussion about *Resi 6* following our extensive hands-on time with it. Three campaigns and six characters, with each of the former inimitably distinct and some of the latter markedly familiar and all of which weave together at various points to tell one incredibly ambitious story over 40 hours of gameplay time.

It's a huge undertaking – and from hands-on experience with over 15 hours play, it might be *too ambitious*. *Resident Evil 6* is one of the most confused, and confusing, experiences that we've yet played. It's simultaneously excellent and terrible, and it's all down to Capcom taking a surprisingly mottled approach to crafting the sixth entry in the main canon, rummaging through the design broom cupboard and re-emerging with three story strands that represent separate distinct eras in *Resident Evil* lore.

> "We want people to play with other players from around the world and with as many people as possible"
> EIICHIRO SASAKI CAPCOM

Fine in theory. But as it stands, only one of these campaigns is any good, with the other two going from bad to abysmal.

Of the three, Leon's campaign is the most enjoyable – because it's the only one that seems like it wasn't created by 6,000 different people, most of whom have apparently never played a videogame before. It's lean and focused, with a commitment to the old *Resi* ideal of fighting your way to safety, not glory or the President's daughter. Over the four hours of gameplay present in the preview code, it is the *Resident Evil 2* that we imagined when we first saw *that* preview shot of Leon standing amidst the flaming wreckage of Raccoon City's streets, with a dash of *Left 4 Dead*'s fast-paced running battles and a smattering of *Outbreak*'s focus on common survivors. It really is very special indeed.

The opening of the demo sets the tone, before kicking breathlessly into higher gears. As you navigate Leon through the narrow corridors of an abandoned campus after shooting the President of the United States, rooms are illuminated by cracks of lighting pouring through towering windows, shadows shifting nervously in the distance, and an unsettling silence instils dread at every turn. After a *28 Weeks Later*-shaming jaunt onto the subway, players find themselves on the streets of Tall Oaks. But rather than arrive at the scene after the fact, you're there as it happens: the trains still run, driven eerily by no one, unlike the cars and ambulances that crash around you as panicked survivors try to flee. Yes: this is classic *Resident Evil*. You might be able to suplex zombies, but you're once again trying to survive the world,

not save it. Ammo is sparse and the graphical grunt of the engine means it's genuinely unsettling. You'll meet fellow survivors, each as desperate as the last, and make a stand with them in scenes that resemble a better version of Leon and Luis's cabin siege in *RE4*.

It's familiar, but small changes bring big results in terms of the overall feel. The camera differs from the last entry, zooming slightly more on targets when aiming, which restricts peripheral vision a touch. It does however add another, albeit minor, dynamic layer to the intense panic of overwhelming odds, compounded by the low ammo and tightly formed environments, when things take a turn for the *Resident Evil 4* later in the demo – with Leon and Helena arriving at a ominous cathedral – and it's tough not to be impressed by Capcom's combination of panic and action.

/// Also impressive is the substantial boost in the partner AI for solo players. *Resident Evil 5*'s major sticking point was Shiva: Chris Redfield's selfish AI partner spent the majority of the game pinching ammo and herbs, rather than demonstrating an overabundance of aptitude. That said, these small inventory sacrifices were somewhat minor compared to the absence of sustained chills, leaving genre buffs unimpressed by the defused tension thanks to Shiva's presence. It's been such a point of concern that – as *Resident Evil 6* once again places heavy emphasis on teaming up for co-op gameplay – director Eiichiro Sasaki had to reassure players it had been addressed in the sequel.

"When you're playing co-op with someone you feel at ease. You feel relaxed because you've got someone by your side all the time," Sasaki explains. "We're putting things in the game so that won't always be the case. There are going to be times when you are forced to split up and you are going to feel horror, not always on a psychological and not always on a visceral level, but because this person is not by your side any more. I know you will say this is just a continuation of what we already had in *Resident Evil 5*, but we've studied that and we are trying to expand on that a little more. We are putting characters in different types of situations, so it is not what you would normally expect from two-player co-op. This is *Resident Evil 6* and we wanted to do something special."

This is certainly the case, in Leon's section at least. The AI certainly seems less intrusive, as Leon's new partner Helena Harper strikes an encouraging balance between usefulness and discretion, capping undead adversaries and staying back appropriately.

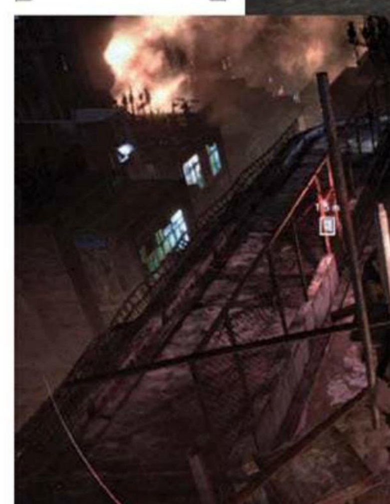
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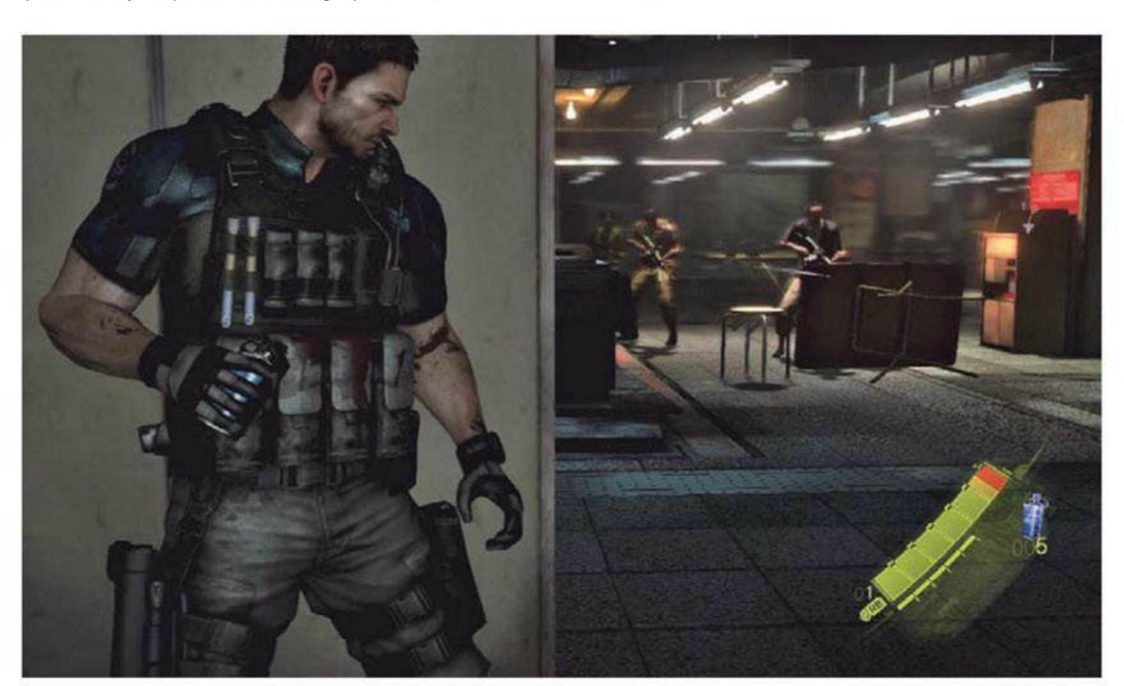
LONG-TIME players of the *Resident Evil* series will be pleased to see that the much-loved Mercenaries mode has made its return in *Resi 6*. They might not be as pleased to see how, though. The score-attack mini-game used to be a reward for players who finished the game. Now it feels like an insurance policy against trade-ins, as it's closer to a full *Call Of Duty*-style experience (like the main game, it has perks) than what's gone on before. It's hard not to feel that, like the rest of the game, it's gone from a simple but refined idea into something massively overblown, as the massive stages make combo-chaining – the heart of Mercenaries play – very difficult indeed. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

> "There are going to be times when [while playing co-op] you are forced to split up and you are going to feel horror"
> EIICHIRO SASAKI CAPCOM



Right: The new dodge and cover mechanics didn't feel particularly well implemented during any of the three campaigns. We expected at least Chris's mission to utilise this latest *Resi* innovation. Below: One significant portion of the story involves Chris running across the rickety rooftops of China, avoiding the latest undead threat, the J'avo. As far as gameplay is concerned it's one of the least inventive, but it's also one of the most visually arresting moments in the franchise's history.





Above: Chapters revolving around Chris place a large emphasis on teamwork, wherein players will support each other through these segments of the campaign. One section of the gameplay features Chris shifting across a rope while his partner, Piers, provides covering fire from a vantage point elsewhere in the level.

GRAPHICAL POWERHOUSE

■ Two of the three campaigns may be perilously close to sinking the *Resident Evil 6* experience, but there's no doubting that Capcom's art and design teams have done great work. Graphically it's a powerhouse, and when the developer manages to combine that with good set-piece design it's very engaging. Thanks, *Uncharted*!

KICKING ARSE

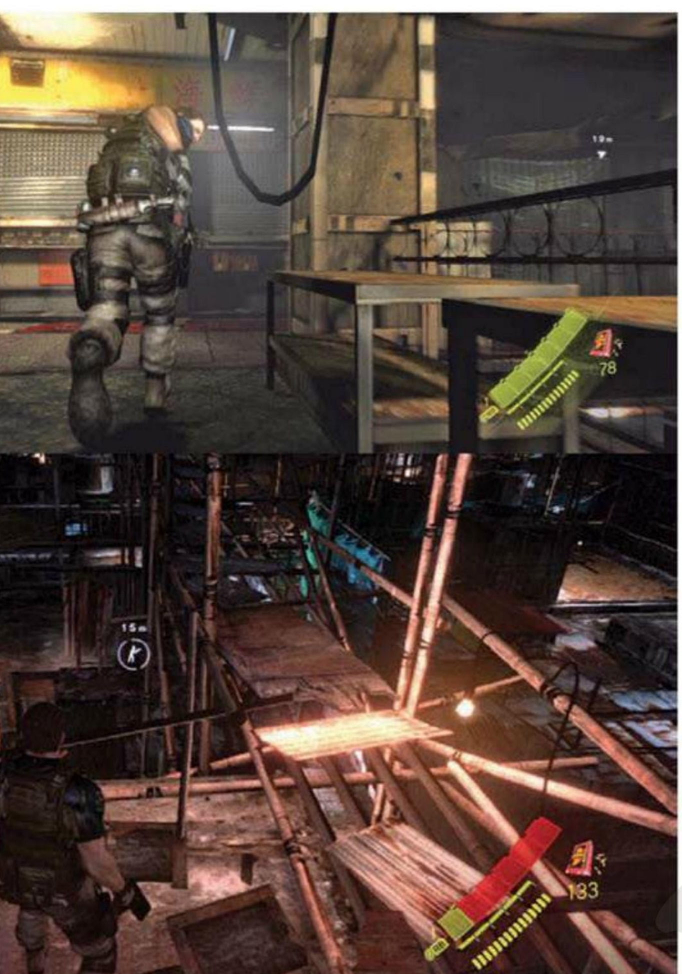
■ As well as firearms, players can now use their fists and feet to attack. A tap of the fire trigger when not aiming a gun will see a physical attack launched. It's mainly to be used as a keep-away device, though: something you'll need when you run out of bullets – they're surprisingly scarce, even in the more gun-focused campaigns.

SHOW ME YOUR SKILLS

■ Those who thought that Resident Evil 5 had strayed too far from survival horror should look away now: *Resi 6* features skill points, picked up for performing well in-game. These points can then be spent at the end of a chapter to buy perks: extra damage, more bullets per pick-up and so on.

HAVING A QUICK TIME

■ QTEs return and it's apparent that Capcom has spent time figuring out how to make them involving for both players. A typical QTE sees one member of the team under attack, with the other then having to assist.: one player might have to waggle their analogue stick, the other stop a cursor in a marked section to fire a kill-shot. It works well.



Which begs the question: if Capcom can so successfully meld old and new in this campaign, why bother to create two extra chapters to go along with it? In doing so there was every chance that Capcom might have diluted its product, and that has come to pass. In contrast to the considered pacing and taut atmosphere of Leon's campaign, Chris Redfield's chapters are a brash, adrenaline-fuelled jolt of nonsense: a poorly paced procession of confusing kill rooms that serve to make a mockery of any claim Capcom has to having passable shooter mechanics.

After a brief introduction wherein Chris has hit the bottle in Eastern Europe, we find the lovable lug forming an allegiance with a military squad quelling the J'avo threat in Asia.

/// If Leon's chapter harks back to classic *Resident Evil* tropes – all prolonged viewpoints, a few disquieting notes from a distant piano and creeping terror – then Chris's chapter thrusts players right back into the action where we last left off in *Resident Evil 5*.

As the action switches to China and the fictional, Balkan-esque Edonia, Chris and his partner Piers battle across rickety rooftops and bombed-out buildings as they tackle incessant waves of the latest addition to *Resident Evil*'s variants on the original plague, the J'avo. Their malformed appearance and various transformations are directly affected by how you interact with them, so accuracy when shooting is paramount if you want to avoid a dozen winged creatures cluttering the battleground.

Resident Evil has finally innovated its long-past-sell-by-date formula and enabled players to walk while shooting, but still finds alternative ways to unnecessarily convolute simplistic third-person shooter mechanics. It culminates in a frustrating, awkward feeling to play, with infected enemies rushing Chris and little time for the player to fully get to grips with other innovations to the formula such as dodging and taking cover. Director Eiichiro Sasaki explained that the control system is just one of the many new facets that will reinforce the primal horror. "While you are on your back, something might jump on top of you out of nowhere and you have to try and shoot it before it eats you," he enthuses. "We've added ways [to the controls] where it is scarier now."

Unfortunately none of this was present in the code we played. Chris's segment fizzles thanks to protracted fights with gun-toting enemy troops, yet again highlighting the weaknesses of the lumpish control scheme and the onerous efforts players go through to survive clichéd encounters. Worse still, its boss encounters are confusing and boring, melding turret sections with muddled objectives. It's far

more of a shooter than even *Resi 5*, and so far a bad one at that.

Chris's campaign is so far poor, but Jake's is awe-inspiringly bad. The campaign for new character Jake Muller – son of nefarious, sunglasses-wearing and mostly invincible Albert Wesker – is Capcom's attempt at *Uncharted*-style high adventure, with into-the-screen running and dramatic escapes from onrushing avalanches. The problem so far is there's no consistency in the way the game plays, and Jake's specialised skills – he's supposed to be able to fight in an aggressive hand-to-hand style like his father – aren't sophisticated enough. That's right: it's a Capcom game that can't get fighting right.

Pairing with Raccoon City survivor Sherry Birkin, little context is given as to how Jake and Sherry end up where they are – another derelict shantytown recalling a few districts of *Resident Evil 4*'s grey-washed Spanish town – but they soon find themselves pursued by a giant foe dubbed Ustanak.

/// The key inspiration here is *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, another tonal reference point that is sure to attract as many detractors as it does fans. Ustanak is an unstoppable behemoth with an unquenchable bloodlust and appears to have eyes for our heroes. His appearance triggers an elaborate run-away-from-camera sequence (thankfully without QTE accompaniment), which – after scrambling across some wooden walkways and jumping through a window – culminates with Jake and Sherry in a large crumbling building. Full of explosive barrels.

You know the drill. Lure the hulking beast towards one of the crimson containers and let rip. It's not very impressive at all, and things get worse. After defeating the Ustanak you're then plunged into another encounter with him, only this time it's a stealth section with instant death if you're discovered. Yes.

Player's have to creep around, not disturbing the creature or his minions that serve to give your position away. Get spotted and you've got two choices: run and hide in a skip, or die. The latter will happen a lot, especially with two players.

It's a contrivance, of course, because not much earlier the Ustanak grabbing you was just one of those things that happen when you're saving the world: a quick QTE and you're out. It jars gameplay-wise, but also sabotages the pacing of the campaign, the crucial element that makes Leon's section so enjoyable. Things then go from bad to worse as players jump on snowmobiles to outrun a gigantic avalanche. Filled with instant death and poor player direction, it all feels like Capcom ran out of ideas.

/// On reflection, the three-chapter concept looks to be barrelling toward failure, which is both a huge shame and something we dreaded happening. That said, still of note is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this approach: how each of the three distinct chapters will weave in and out of one another.

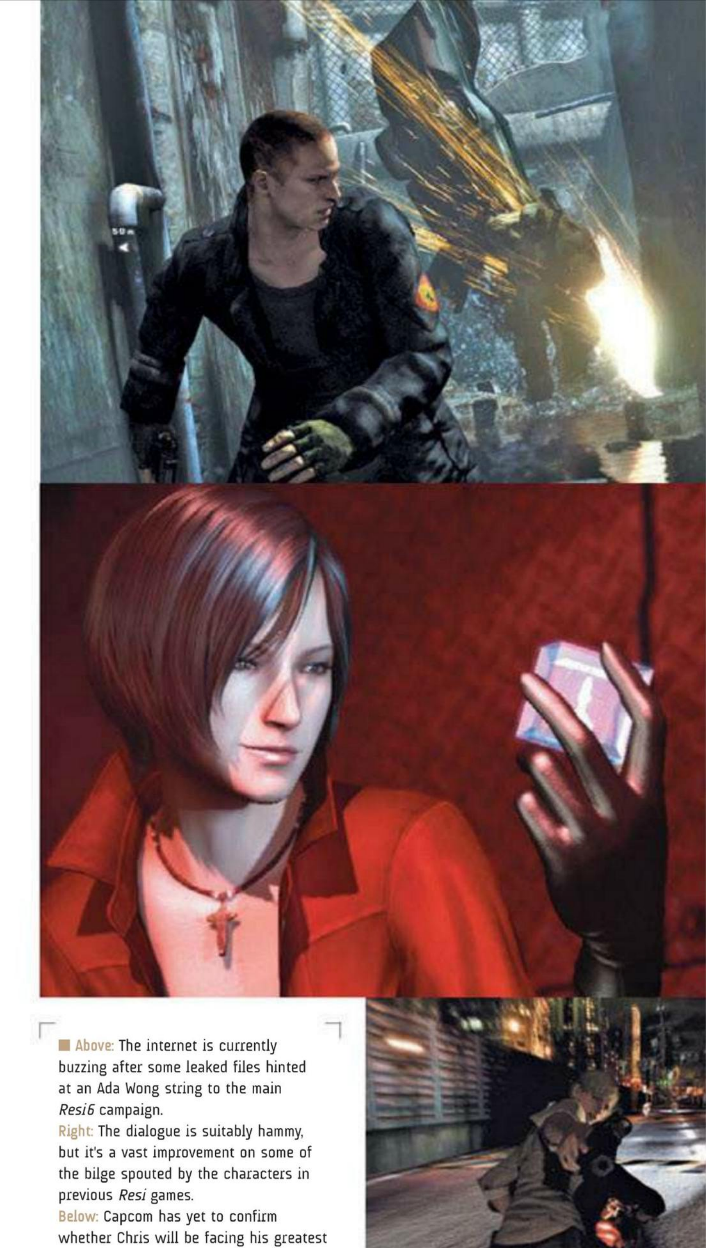
A later boss battle involving Ustanak will have Leon and Helena joining Jake and Sherry to battle the enraged beast, switching the action from two-player co-op to four-player when online. For producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi the idea behind the crossover was to craft the most immersive *Resident Evil* story told in the series to date.

"I should make it clear that the crossover element of the game is not just about gameplay but it's also about story," says Kobayashi. "It's kind of the guiding feature of *Resident Evil 6*. There will be points in the game where it is not the four-player co-op that is a crossover but you will see stories from different points of view. You might see the characters from another game run across your field of vision or appear on a TV screen or something like that."

> "I want you to take me at my word when I say variation is the key word of this crossover feature"
> HIROYUKI KOBAYASHI CAPCOM

Whether anyone will persist long enough with the latter two campaigns to see these crossovers is another matter entirely. It's an ambitious project to say the least, but one that feels forced and ultimately poor for most of its run time.

From a gameplay standpoint, Capcom has made noticeable improvements to the AI, some long overdue enhancements to gameplay and returned to the classic scares that have been conspicuously absent from the series for the better part of a decade. But so far only one chapter – Leon's eerie jaunt through Raccoon 2.0 – can be called a success. The other two are simultaneously too ambitious and not ambitious enough, plagued by poor design and half-baked mechanics. It feels like Capcom's reach has exceeded its grasp, and with only a few months left in development we could be looking at one of the most lopsided gaming experiences ever made.



Above: The internet is currently buzzing after some leaked files hinted at an Ada Wong string to the main *Resi6* campaign.
Right: The dialogue is suitably hammy, but it's a vast improvement on some of the bilge spouted by the characters in previous *Resi* games.
Below: Capcom has yet to confirm whether Chris will be facing his greatest nemesis once again: giant boulders.

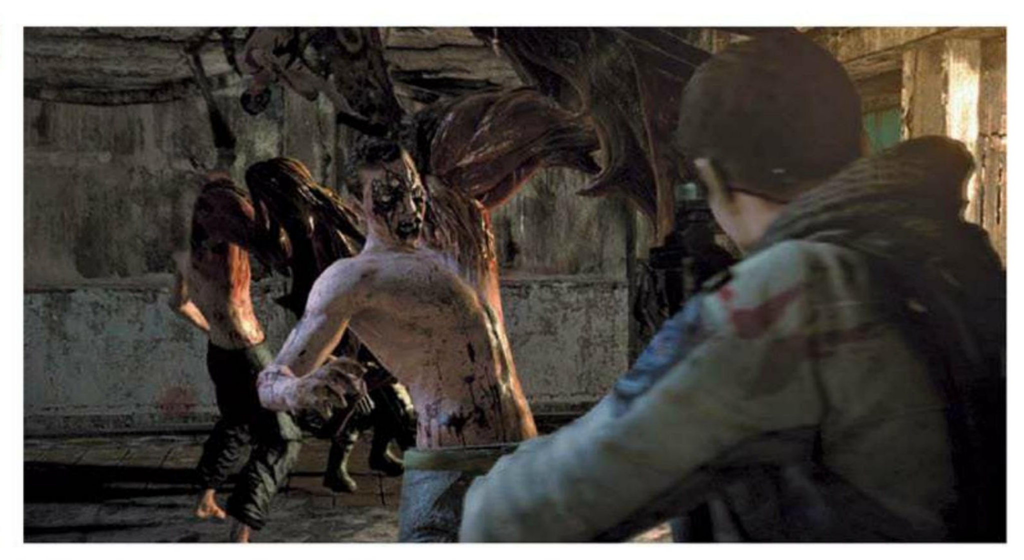


Right: The four-player co-op enables online players to join forces briefly and fight alongside one another. Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi promises these segments will constitute more than just a series of boss battles.



DUCK AND COVER

THE HEAVILY promoted cover system and dodge mechanics were present but hardly integral during the three campaign sections **games™** played through. Not only did it not feel particularly necessary to use cover or dodge enemy fire but, like a lot of the game's mechanics, the explanation of how it works isn't obvious. At the present time it's hard to gauge how valuable and innovative these features are and what exactly they'll contribute to the overall experience.





Above: It'll be interesting how Jake's character will interact with *Resident Evil* veterans and any potential Wesker traits the character may possess. Suffice to say, it's not likely that he'll be trusted by the other characters. Left: Depending on where you shoot J'avo troops, they will mutate into different malformed creatures. These bat-like things sprout from their ass, but they'll also grow elongated limbs that can attack from long range.





HORROR SHOW

WHILE THE perennial go-to *Resident Evil* joke is to poke fun at the dialogue and acting, Capcom has clearly injected some money and talent into *Resident Evil 6*'s cut-scenes. While still verging on the hammy side, both Leon and Chris's campaigns begin with some highly detailed CG cut-scenes and feature dialogue that didn't make us want to rip our ears off. Chris's proved the most fascinating, finding the ex-STARS soldier some time after *Resident Evil 5* in Eastern Europe nursing a drinking problem. It's a rather rousing scene, as a mysterious soldier called Piers coaxes him out of retirement.

Pikmin 3

CONCEPT Despite its new platform, *Pikmin 3* sticks pretty closely to the roots of its GameCube predecessors. But we won't hold that against it.

Five reasons to cut the cynicism and embrace Pikmin 3

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Wii U
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Release: Q4 2012
Genre: Platform
Players: 1

Nintendo Three Profile

Third time lucky, might not be the most apt phrase but it's certainly true to say that Nintendo has a habit of nailing its biggest franchises on their third entries. Does this mean that Pikmin 3 will be a world-class threequel? We certainly hope so.

Nintendo Three History

Kid Icarus: Uprising
2012 [3DS]

Super Metroid
1994 [SNES]

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
1991 [SNES]

Super Mario Bros. 3
1988 [NES]

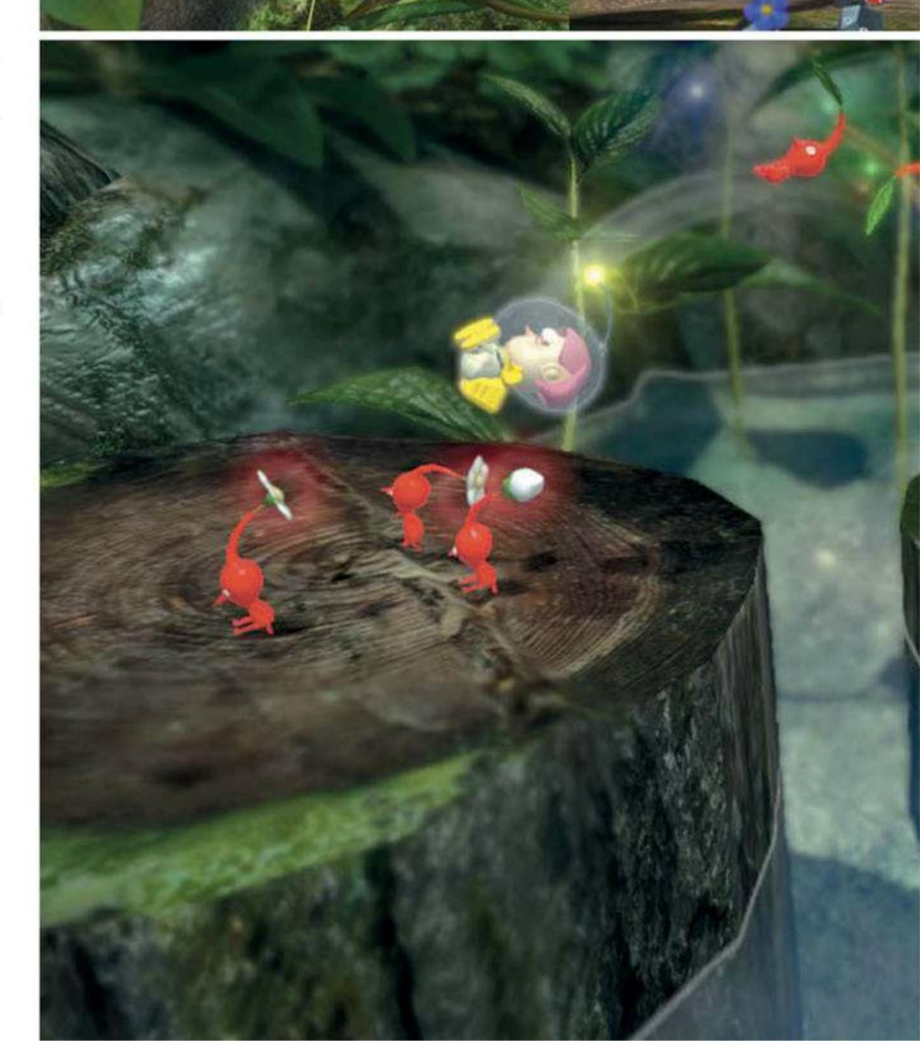
High Point

They're all exemplary but Link's third outing is just about one of the greatest games ever made.

Gamers can be a funny bunch sometimes. We've spent years hounding Nintendo for news about *Pikmin 3,* nagging about it every E3 for the past eight years, and as soon as the game is revealed certain people start to complain. Perhaps it's the timing of the reveal… right alongside the demonstration of Wii U, *Pikmin 3* may not seem like the most appropriate game when fans are hoping for a new *Mario*, *Zelda* or *Metroid* to show off the system's capabilities. But separate *Pikmin 3* from trade show anxieties for a second and it's obvious that this is going to be one great game. Trust us, games™ has played Pikmin 3 and we can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that the wait has been worth it. If you loved either of the first two games then this is the *Pikmin* sequel you've been waiting for – deep gameplay, beautiful visuals and new ways to play should make it one of the first essential Wii U titles.

1 STUNNING DETAIL

OF ALL Nintendo's Wii U games, *Pikmin 3* is the one that best takes advantage of Wii U's HD, high-resolution visuals. And the game could not be better suited to its new home. That extra power allows Pikmin to be realised in ways not previously possible on GameCube or Wii, with fantastic detail to the undergrowth world, a more zoomed out view for tactical advantage, and the ability to display a hell of a lot of Pikmin on screen at once. Nintendo claims that the power makes precision aiming possible now, as well.



"Now you can see the tiny movements of each Pikmin and the natural setting is more beautiful"

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO NINTENDO

2

4



5

2 CONTROL FOR ALL

PIKMIN 3 HAS been in development for years, across all sorts of Nintendo formats, and it has picked up a friend along the way, in the form of Wii's Motion Plus controller. An optional control method, this Wii Remote+ and Nunchuk combo allows characters to be moved independently of Pikmin, which are guided with the pointer. It works a treat, and we're happy to see it supported. The default GamePad is supported too, of course, and some players will love the way it gives a complete view of the map as you play. Alternatively, use Motion Plus while looking at the map by propping the GamePad on its included stand.

3 A GREATER SENSE OF FUN

ONE OF the things that's always set Pikmin apart from other real-time strategies is its sense of personality and fun. And, believe us, that feeling is more than retained in *Pikmin 3*. Wii U's HD display ensures that colours vibrantly burst from the screen like a Pixar blu-ray, the increased detail allows for even more silly Pikmin animations to be used and the new soundtrack may well be the most upbeat yet. All of this successfully distracts from the fact that Pikmin is all about throwing murderous vegetables at the local wildlife to kill them and carry their corpses away.

4 FLYING PIKMIN!

NINTENDO'S E3 demonstration would have you believe that Rock Pikmin are the only new addition to *Pikmin 3's* army of veggie men, but we know there's at least one more. Right there on the title screen, a couple of pink Pikmin fly over the top of a stream towards some red friends. The tactical advantages of this new Pikmin are obvious, and we look forward to seeing what devious challenges Nintendo has prepared to incorporate flying Pikmin into its game.

5 DEEPER STRATEGY

PIKMIN 3 IS no re-invention of an old favourite, it's a direct evolution and that means more of what we love plus some extra elements. Pikmin can now pick up pieces of debris and assemble them into bridges, for example, while the new rock Pikmin can be flung to break through hard barriers, even on the shell of an enemy. And now with four astronauts to control (compared to the two in the last game) expect the level design to get very complicated to necessitate passing Pikmin back and forth.

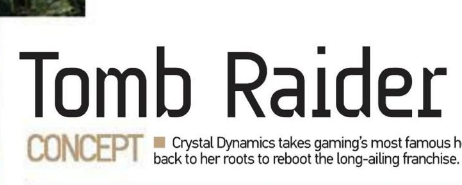
■ Below: New weapons like the bow and arrow will offer different ways in which to shake up combat, but they also exist to give the newly-added experience system far more depth. Focus on your archery skills and soon you'll be able to reuse any arrow you fire.

THE LONG WAIT

WHILE THE MORE cynical gamer would be well within their rights to assume that *Tomb Raider*'s delay may have been sanctioned to push it out of the now packed end of year window – not many games have the courage to compete with the likes of *Assassin's Creed* and the mighty *COD* – it seems far more likely Square Enix has seen the potential in ensuring this iteration is done correctly. For all of the mistakes made by *Tomb Raider* in the past, this far more gritty interpretation has us almost willing to forget the troubles of before and embrace the new vision. The future could once again be bright for the woman who was once the face of videogames.



■ Right: Stealth has never been an idea embraced by *Tomb Raider* but Crystal Dynamics has decided now is a good time to play with the format.



Tomb Raider

CONCEPT Crystal Dynamics takes gaming's most famous heroine back to her roots to reboot the long-ailing franchise.

This is the comeback we've been waiting for

Despite recently being moved into 2013, every new snippet (or in this case hands-on demo) that Square Enix reveals only serves to push *Tomb Raider* a step higher on the must-play chart. Focusing on Lara Croft and her roots, Crystal Dynamics has stated that this is taking gaming's most famous female back to the events we haven't been treated to, showing a different side to her; one far more delicate and unsure. Add in that the developer has created a world that's a thousand miles away from the colourful, welcoming *Underworld*, for example, and you have a product that moves away from any previous fiction – don't expect Lara to be loop-the-looping on any flagpoles. Aside from actually making the franchise relevant again, however, it also marks the most significant shift in *Tomb Raider* lore since its debut, opening up the potential to deliver on millions of unfulfilled expectations from almost two decades ago.

It all starts with how Crystal Dynamics is trying to make Lara Croft a real person. Easily its finest decision when re-envisioning *Tomb Raider*, Lara is authentic and fragile. For years she has been portrayed as a self-assured sex symbol and almost nothing more. Now, she's desperate for help, scrambling to a nearby walkie-talkie to radio Conrad Roth, the captain of a wrecked ship, that she is in dire need of assistance. Alone, confused and scared, gaming's first heroine has never been this relatable or deep as a character.

/// The joy continues as the developer chooses not to follow 'that' template. There are far too *Tomb Raider* games that merely attempt to mimic the original's successes rather than branch out into new territory. In order to move away from the foundations of before, hub sections have been introduced so Lara has a sense of freedom. Dotted around the game, they serve to break up the more structured and linear parts. One forest-based area offers Ms Croft the chance to test her self-taught bow-and-arrow skills, killing a deer using the standard aim-and-shoot setup before gutting her prey and feasting on its meat.

Crystal Dynamics has also looked at other videogame successes, deciding that the now somewhat tired experience system – a staple of most genres – is ripe for its new project. Most of Lara's actions will earn her XP – spent in camps dotted around the game – which will upgrade her weapons, skills and items. These range from improving her archery ability (you can start recovering spent arrows, for example) or evolving Lara's Survival Instinct, which gives her the power to view her surroundings in an almost infrared glow. It's slightly clichéd, sure, but it finds a new lease of life thanks to *Tomb Raider* daring to move away from the family friendly and accessible ways of old.

What we will get in 2013 is most certainly aimed at the more adult, mature gamer. Much has been made of the apparent sexual threat made against Lara, for example, highlighting this to be a considerably darker tale. One of her colleagues, Sam, is dragged to his apparent death by a threatening local; Lara is constantly forced to crawl through dank, claustrophobic passages adorned with questionable imagery; wounds are shown to both hurt and tear. For children, this is not.

Ultimately, the US-based company is trying to serve the franchise has best it can, leaving ego well and truly at the door by 'borrowing' a few elements from other games. Last month we described Lara's return as *Uncharted: The Rollercoaster* and there's certainly some truth to that. To ensure that the pacing is engaging and slower, the more exploratory sections are often bookended by Croft hurtling down a waterfall or relying on QTEs. As Crystal Dynamics' Darrell Gallagher told **games™**: "In each player's hands, the pacing is going to be different. There's nothing to force or keep you going at a specific pace."

Whether or not the finished product can carry such expectation throughout an entire experience is solely in the hands of its creators. In terms of justifying the hype, though, it's firmly on the right path.

> "Forget everything you know about Tomb Raider; we are exploring things that have never been done before in this game"
>
> DARRELL GALLAGHER, CRYSTAL DYNAMICS



INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3
Origin: US
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Release: 5 March 2013
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Before it took on *Tomb Raider* as its baby, Crystal Dynamics had found flashes of success. *The Legacy Of Kain* series remains fondly remembered today and *Gex* will always have its place, even though that may not be in the most positive of ways...

Developer History

Tomb Raider: Underworld **2008 [Multi]**
Tomb Raider: Anniversary **2007 [Multi]**
Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver **1999 [Multi]**
Gex: Enter The Gecko **1999 [Multi]**

High Point

Tomb Raider: Underworld proved that the developer had a certain skill and aptitude for the franchise, creating one of the better games within the series for some time.



AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

SIMCITY WILL enable you to play with other players via EA' s Origin, with the world map divided into regions. Not only will their cities' failure or success affect your own, spreading prosperity or crime, but you'll also be able to coordinate with other players on big projects like creating international airports to benefit the region.

LOOKING THROUGH THE CITY'S SKIN

THE FUN comes from watching how the underlying systems responded to your choices, and with Glass Box – Maxis's new simulation engine – they're more complex than ever, taking into account everything from geographical features, water tables, pollution and weather to economics, crime and population.

MY KIND OF TOWN

WHILE IT'S entirely possible to create any kind of city you like in *SimCity*, the ability to create specialised cities, that fill particular niches – such as being industrial, residential or tourist-focused – is key to the game. That'll be especially important in multiplayer.



SimCity

CONCEPT ■ Maxis returns to the world of *SimCity* bringing a higher level of simulated detail than ever before, and introducing online connected play between players' cities.

The living, breathing metropolis gets connected

There's little doubt in our minds that cities are living things. Every city in the world has its own special character; constantly growing, and driven by the needs and desires of the millions of people in it. Just about every aspect of human life is reflected in a city; our social and cultural mores, philosophy, religion and science are expressed through economics, architecture and the people who choose to dwell there. It's why historians often judge a civilisation by its cities and their level of complexity.

That was what Maxis tapped into way back in 1993 with the original *SimCity*, which tried to mirror much of that macrocosm as possible in an engaging videogame. As time and technology have moved forward, each game in the 23 year-old series has added layers of complexity, but its 2013 iteration promises an unparalleled level of detail and complexity. Not only will even more events like traffic jams, accidents, people working, fires, crimes and police chases play out in detail on city streets, but thanks to Glass Box, Maxis's impressive new engine, there are an almost bewildering array of simulation agents that realistically govern them. But Maxis hasn't stopped there, with an addition that could never be simulated in online multiplayer. This real-life social element will impact massively upon your city, with the online world divided into regions, each with another player-controlled city in them. Just how these player cities are run will actually have a social and economic impact on your own budding metropolis. That infinitely random human element could be that final special spark that really brings cities in *SimCity* to life as never before – and it's a genuinely exciting prospect.

LIVING CITIES

■ AS EVER, being a mayor in *SimCity* will be about meeting the ever-growing needs of your Sims. You'll be able to see them react to what you do, and to simulated events and natural disasters like never before in the game's beautiful graphical style.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: EA
Developer: Maxis
Release: Q1 2013
Players: TBA

Developer Profile

Maxis was the house that industry icon Will Wright built, and he has a self-confessed passion for creating complex organic systems, so it's hardly surprising that many games have been simulations built on that idea. From its inception and the creation of *SimCity*, Maxis has given gamers increasingly complex worlds to play in.

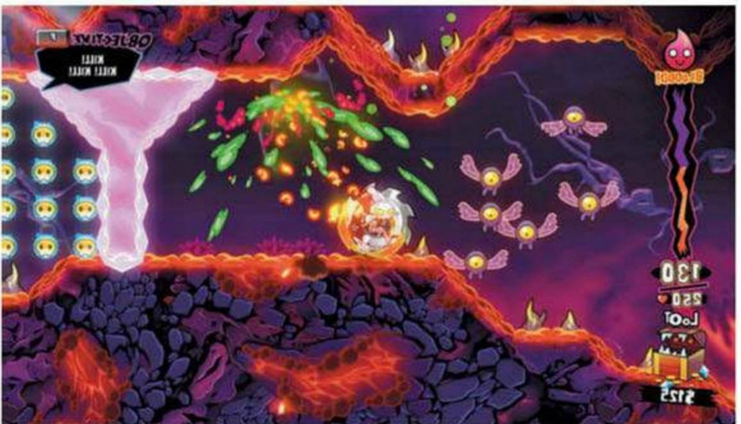
Developer History

Spore 2008 [Multi]
The Sims 2000 [Multi]
SimCity 2000 1993 [PC]
SimCity 1989 [PC]

High Point

The Sims saw Maxis's trademark gaming systems fused with an addictive social and nurturing element that appealed to millions worldwide as they cared (or didn't) for their clutch of tiny people.

■ Below: Demon bunny Ash has to destroy a mini-boss to unlock a gate to progress further in each stage. Each boss fight culminates in a barmy *WarioWare*-style test.





Hell Yeah! Wrath Of The Dead Rabbit

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC
Origin: France
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Arkedo Studio
Release: 2012
Players: 1

Developer Profile

A small independent studio founded in 2006 by Camille Guermonprez and Aurélien Régard, Arkedo has released a string of quirky games for Nintendo DS and download. Now predominantly focused on digital production, Arkedo's retro spirit and simplistic game design has made them one of the most interesting and creative entities working out of the independent sector.

Developer History

OMG: Our Manic Game
2010 [Mobile]
Arkedo Series
2009 [Multi]
Big Bang Mini
2009 [DS]
Nervous Brickdown
2007 [DS]

High Point

The excellent created-in-a-month three-part Xbox Live Indie Game *Arkedo Series* is not only addictive but puts a fresh twist on retro conventions.

CONCEPT ■ A Metroidvania platformer, which involves minigames, humungous weapons and the leaked sex pics of a demon rabbit.

How Sonic Team influenced Arkedo Studio's rabbit revenge platformer

There's something alluringly familiar about Arkedo Studio's latest gore-fuelled digital offering. If you were to take *Hell Yeah! Wrath Of The Dead Rabbit* and strip it down to its constituent parts, you'd find traces of every know derivation of *Mario Bros.*, an abundance of Japanese manga influences, psychedelic Saturday-morning Nickelodeon cartoons and even a mega-portion of waggle-friendly *WarioWare* games. Yet, in terms of direct input, the indie studio received a few tips from one of the indisputable masters of the genre.

"Imagine how cool it was when Sega asks one day, 'Oh, by the way, the Sonic Team is here; would you like to have a chat with them?'" beams Arkedo co-founder Camille Guermonprez. "'Erm, hell yeah!'"

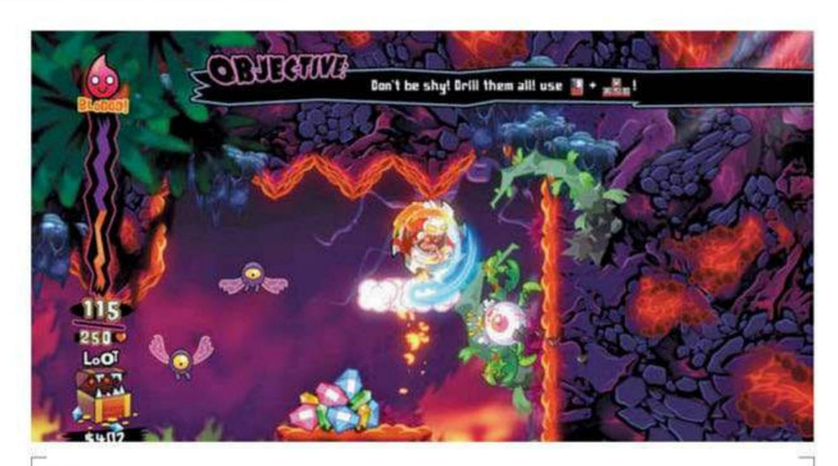
Sonic might not be the most obvious comparison for the Metroidvania platformer, with Ash – the titular dead rabbit – ripping through Hell's inhabitants in ultra-violent fashion. However, there's a lightning-fast pace to the maze-like platform structure, with Ash riding a sort of motorised saw-blade that enables him to plough through rows of enemies in double-time. For Guermonprez and his team, gaining feedback from one of its biggest inspirations was as much a nerve-wracking experience as it was a case of wish fulfilment.

"We had a special lesson from the Sonic Team on the handling of a platformer," Guermonprez explains. "And they cheered us up and said that this is a very good game. There were just a couple of little criticisms, such as too much inertia when we were jumping on platforms and staying there. They proposed how we could improve it – how cool is that?"

Arkedo has certainly addressed any lag that might have been present before, as we watch Ash mutilate several of the game's key monsters. The only thing that appears to keep up with the pace of the bunny hellspawn and his organ-grinding hog are his motor-mouth repertoire of quips and the ubiquitous offbeat humour found across every inch of cartoon Hell.

> "After Sega signed us they said they were not going to call for eight months"
> CAMILLE GUERMONPREZ ARKEDO STUDIO

"I remember being in Edinburgh in a boarding house as a kid reading *Amiga Power*, and I was so amazed by Reverend Stuart Campbell," smiles Guermonprez. "A year ago I wrote him a letter asking if he wanted to work together on the game. He said, 'I don't know you, what are you talking about? Fuck you!' I then showed him the game and he said, 'Okay, I want to work with you.' We've been working with him for the last year on all the dialogue and the monster index… all the hundred monsters that you kill have a story. That was awesome; that was basically the dream of my life… making the game I want with some of the people who made me want to enter the field, backed by Sega… Hell yeah!"



■ Above: Gems are found scattered around Hell, which Ash can collect as he carves his way through the damned. Loot can be spent on weapon and vehicle upgrades at the shop – the proprietor of which is a top hat-wearing squid.

"We're trying to make a fighting game that is bigger than any other fighting game ever"
JOHN EDWARDS NETHERREALM STUDIOS

Injustice: Gods Among us

CONCEPT ■ The *Mortal Kombat* team makes a fully fledged attempt at a superhero-based fighting game, blending mechanics from genre mainstays with its own kinetic style.

With great power comes great responsibility (and armour)

■ Above: Just like it did with *Mortal Kombat*, NetherRealm is promising *Injustice* will have a huge single-player component to match its online multiplayer offering. That'll include an extended narrative campaign and challenges galore.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii U
Origin: US
Publisher: Warner Bros
Developer: NetherRealm Studios
Release: Q1 2013
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Players: 2

Ed Boon Profile

Ed Boon has been a mainstay of the fighting genre since creating *Mortal Kombat* with John Tobias. He's also worked on Midway's *Arctic Thunder* and *Blitz: The League*.

Ed Boon History

Mortal Kombat **2009 [Multi]**
John Woo presents Stranglehold **2007 [Multi]**
Blitz: The League **2005 [Multi]**
Mortal Kombat **1993 [Multi]**

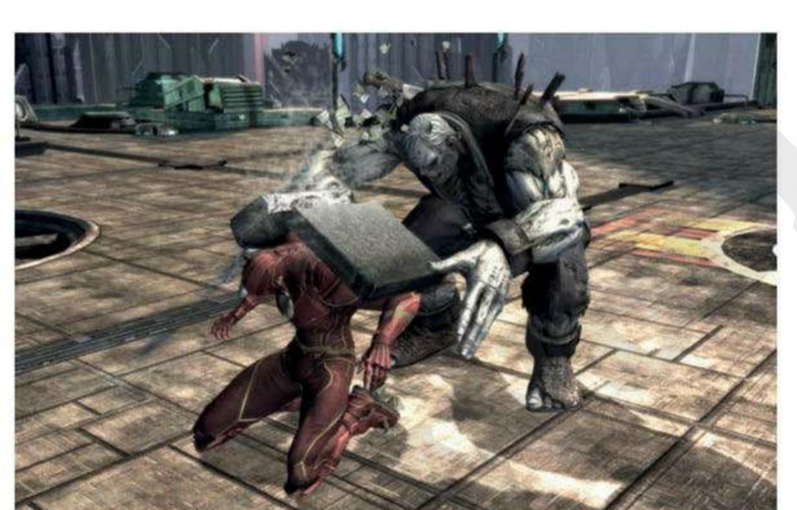
High Point

While *Mortal Kombat* has a special place in history, many aficionados have an abiding affection for *Mortal Kombat II*, which introduced many core series elements.

Portraying superheroes in games isn't easy. It's ironic that in a medium that allows for so much scope for fantasy fulfilment that all too often the necessity to make an actual *game* leaves superheroes a pale reflection of their fictional counterparts, and leeched of the epic feelings of power that make them so enjoyable in fiction. That – and the all-important comic geek question of how to narratively explain just how Batman would survive a punch from the likes of Superman – is a big part of the challenge being faced by *Mortal Kombat* developer NetherRealm Studios in its upcoming fighter *Injustice: Gods Among Us*.

This isn't the first time it's tried to tackle superheroes, but the rather lacklustre *Mortal Kombat Vs. DC Universe* was hobbled by the fact that, while it looked like a *Mortal Kombat* game, thanks to the inclusion of DC's heroes, it lacked much of what makes *Mortal Kombat* so enticing – namely wanton bloodletting. For *Injustice: Gods Among Us,* NetherRealm is attempting to cross over entirely into the superhero realm, pitting the heroic likes of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and Flash against villains like Solomon Grundy and Harley Quinn in blockbuster-style combat. It'll retain a *Mortal Kombat* feel, but NetherRealm is promising a deep fighting engine with elements being adopted from the genre at large. You now push back to block, and there's an emphasis on cross-ups and juggles with a three-button attack system. An additional character trait button ensures every hero has access to special abilities that'll make them feel closer to their fictional ideal.

Just like it did with *Mortal Kombat*, NetherRealm is promising *Injustice* will have a huge single-player component to match its online multiplayer offering, including an extended narrative campaign and challenges galore. There's a darker edge to *Injustice* than you might imagine too, with heroes and villains wearing armoured versions of their traditional costumes, and often sporting more violent attacks than the licence would perhaps suggest. But while some of the superhero fisticuffs look impressive, modern fighting games need a deep and balanced fighting system to appeal to the hardcore and attain any kind of longevity. NeatherRealm promised that but arguably didn't deliver in 2011's *Mortal Kombat*. Whether it'll manage to make *Injustice* deliver all the required superhero gusto while making it a worthy fighter is the big question. If it can't do that, it won't matter a wit how powerful you look, or how cleverly it explains just how Batman is going to survive a punch from the Man of Steel.





■ Above: There's a returning trend in fighting games to involve the environment in battles, and *Injustice* will enable players to throw elements like cars at each other and knock each other through stages and buildings.





■ Above: The Gorn are arguably a good choice for the snarling villains in *Star Trek*; they're a race martial-focused enough to make sense as dangerous aggressors, while their warlike society in the game explains the various different types of Gorn you'll go up against.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
Developer: Digital Extremes
Release: Q1 2013
Genre: Action-Adventure
Players: 2

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Digital Extremes co-developed on the *Unreal* and *BioShock* franchises. Its own games, like *Dark Sector*, *Pariah* and *The Darkness II*, while less polished, are often unusual takes on genres.

DEVELOPER HISTORY

The Darkness II
2012 [Multi]
BioShock
2008 [PS3]
Dark Sector
2008 [Multi]
Unreal
1998 [PC]

High Point

The Darkness II is arguably Digital Extreme's biggest highlight in recent years, showcasing the developer's ability to successfully design a very different, powers-driven take on the FPS.

Star Trek

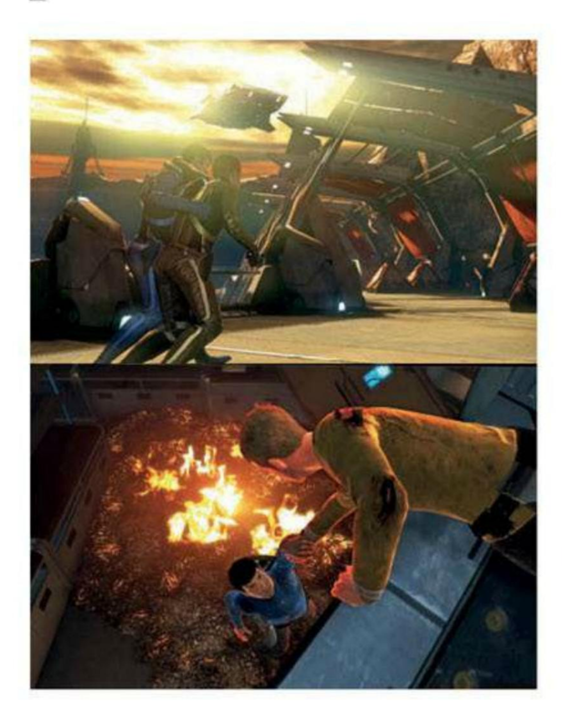
CONCEPT ■ Digital Extremes attempts to meld the intellect of Star Trek with a high-action game.

Gorn with the wind...

There's arguably a good reason why there aren't that many *Star Trek* videogames in comparison to other big sci-fi franchises like *Star Wars*. Despite its space opera-style trappings – big space ships, alien enemies and phaser guns galore – *Trek* has always felt a little bit more cerebral. After all, its heroic protagonists are actually explorers and scientists, and their habit of more often resorting to scientific or diplomatic solutions than instantly reaching for the phasers during galaxy-threatening crises doesn't always play to the medium's strengths.

But JJ Abrams' bombastic, lens flare-filled reboot of the franchise in 2009 managed, while retaining some of that *Trek* flavour, to jazz the formula up enough that a third-person co-op shooter set in this universe doesn't feel totally incongruous. *Star Trek* promises to inject some of the franchise's traditional cerebral trappings into its gameplay, and the classic Kirk and Spock odd couple relationship is at the heart of that.

Their 'two sides of the same coin' personalities and nature promise to be reflected in its asymmetrical co-op, which gives them each very different abilities. Both will be more than able to wield a phaser with deadly accuracy, but Kirk for example will





lead in fire fights with more attack-based skills, while Spock buffs his Captain's attacks by scanning for weak spots and revealing tactical advantages in the environment. *Star Trek*'s intense third-person shooter combat, complete with cover system and different weapon types will also play an homage to the classic interspecies fisticuffs of the original Captain Kirk – the great William Shatner – with what's looking like some down and dirty, up close and personal melee combat.

It's hardly surprising that you'll need to toughen up and get ready to use your fists in *Star Trek*, given who you'll be fighting. The classic reptilian *Trek* race, the Gorn, are being touted as the game's primary villains, and this iteration of the creatures is far more formidable than the rubber-suited beings from *Star Trek: TOS*. They'll be physically powerful and come in a variety of types that attack in different ways. Thankfully you'll have more than just fists and phasers with which to tackle this re-envisioned alien menace.

While we're looking forward to the opportunity to sit in the vaunted Captain's chair and take in the quintessentially *Trek* view from the bridge of the USS Enterprise, the Enterprise herself is more than just a handy planet-hopping contrivance. In ground combat, Kirk can call up to Scotty on the Enterprise and request devastating orbital photon torpedo strikes against massed enemies like the hordes of Gorn.

Digital Extremes is promising to do it all in *Trek*, and that includes honouring the traditional exploration of strange new worlds at the heart of the *Trek* mythos. With the original Vulcan home world having been destroyed in the first JJ Abrams movie, players will explore the mysterious New Vulcan.

It's clear the developer is going to invoke as many classic *Star Trek* images, ideas and feelings in the game as it can, but put a fresh gameplay spin on them. The ability to 'Space jump' through the vacuum outside the Enterprise as part of an action epic set-piece is a great example of that. This could well be the game that *Star Trek* fans have been waiting years for, with its developer promising a narrative worthy of the series, hopefully one that will also successfully take into account more modern and action-based gaming sensibilities and preferences.

More importantly, Digital Extremes has always managed to put a different spin on its games, like the underrated but imaginative *Dark Sector* or supernatural-driven *The Darkness II* – and from what it's shown us of *Star Trek*, it's looking like the interesting take on third-person co-op shooting could take *Trek* in a bold direction that the franchise has never gone before.

> "The Gorn are among the most iconic villains in the Star Trek universe and their role in this game lives up to that"
>
> **BRIAN MILLER, PARAMOUNT PICTURES**

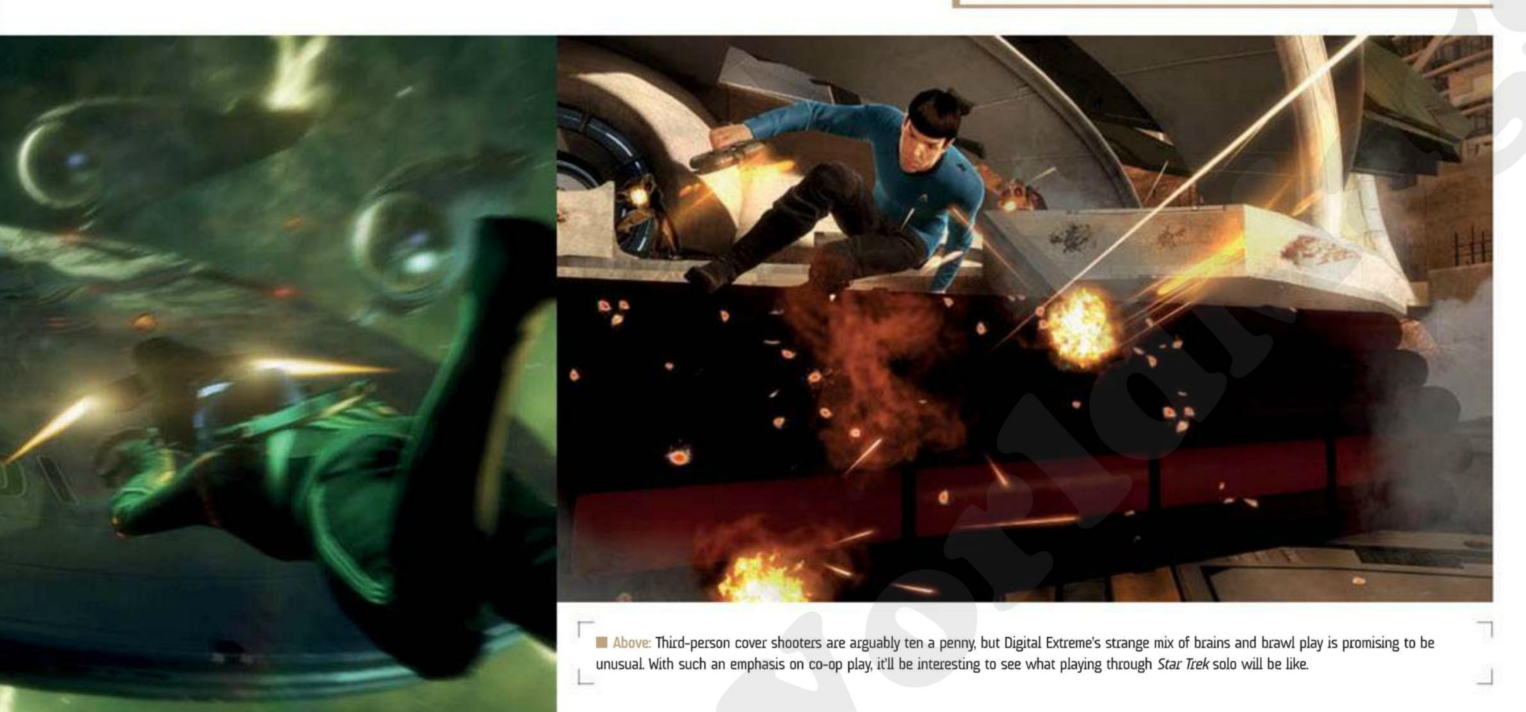
Below: Digital Extremes promises that *Trek* fans will be more than satisfied by the high level of fan service in its game.





I HAVE BEEN, AND WILL ALWAYS BE... YOUR FRIEND

STAR TREK'S CO-OP play isn't simply limited to supporting each other in combat with asymmetrical abilities, like Kirk's skill for providing blistering covering fire, and Spock's more tactical abilities like scanning enemies for weak points and searching the environment for useful things. In its attempt to make co-op extend to every area of play, Digital Extremes has constructed levels in *Star Trek* that require players to work together. Players will need to help each other in the platforming and acrobatic-based sections of the game, as Kirk and Spock run, jump and explore the game's various planets. It all seems very much in keeping with *Star Trek*'s spirit of adventure.



Above: Third-person cover shooters are arguably ten a penny, but Digital Extreme's strange mix of brains and brawl play is promising to be unusual. With such an emphasis on co-op play, it'll be interesting to see what playing through *Star Trek* solo will be like.

Hitman: Absolution

CONCEPT ■ The long-awaited return of Agent 47 fuses the considered strategy of old with contemporary third-person action bombast.

Game director Tore Blystad discusses the new direction of Agent 47

The ambiguity surrounding the direction of *Hitman: Absolution* has lead to plenty of confusion among fans of the calculated killer. Early concerns pegged the long-awaited return of Agent 47 as an overblown exercise in action gaming; a slick-looking but shallow return to the series that muddles the formula to the extent that cinematic action sequences involving pursuing police helicopters and taut hallway shootouts took precedence over the protracted stealth, exquisite timing and inventive delivery of fatal dispatch so characteristic of the series.

However, this indulgence of histrionics isn't at the sacrifice of myriad gameplay choices, intense stratagem and open-ended structure to level design. Exploring two of *Absolution*'s missions, Tore Blystad discusses the design decisions that should reassure fans that Agent 47 retains his deadly strategic edge.

"This is what we have been describing internally as a kill sandbox," says game director Tore Blystad of mission King Of Chinatown – an early chapter in 47's story wherein he must locate the head honcho of a local gang and execute him. "The level is not huge but it has enough variation that it can cater for many hours of gameplay. You can finish it in five minutes if you know what you're doing, but getting to those five minutes takes time. And you can hone your skills; replayability comes from how you want to take out your target. We have six different ways: everything from shooting, poisoning him, blowing up his car but you can also get to those moments in different ways by taking disguises or luring the target, tricking him, waiting for him to eat something."

/// It's a blistering representation of the versatility found throughout *Absolution*'s focused direction. Engaging in an overtly maniacal killing spree is made equally as gratifying as a methodically plotted stealth takedown. In gameplay terms, it has meant an overhaul on combat, but attention was likewise paid to the aesthetic fidelity to ensure the insanity remained relatively grounded. "We wanted to create from a visual point of view a hyper-realistic world with a touch of noir to it," says Blystad. "We really wanted to make it as dramatic as possible but we also wanted players to look at something that had triple-A quality in the visuals. But also if you start developing a game that is way too realistic you start losing the fun."

While players can spend hours surveying targets, analysing walking paths, nearby hazards and characters that come into close proximity, IO Interactive has included checkpoints so as not to grind the pacing to a halt. As Blystad explains, "We don't want players to be investing half an hour or more in a level and then dying at the very end, because that's not very fun. We want the player to invest in the level, maybe fail, but not lose too much of their time investment. Just trying stuff out fast and that's what checkpoints allow. Just look at the King Of Chinatown: you can fail and reload but you're not losing an hour of gameplay you invested, waiting for patrols and all the timing. But you can still have that experience of trying different ways to taking out your target and the right planning can go a long way to help you."

> "We wanted to make it as dramatic as possible, but we also wanted something that had triple-A quality"
>
> TORE BLYSTAD IO INTERACTIVE

While that no doubt comes as a relief for a sizeable portion of gamers, Blystad also reveals that *Absolution* will have a bulkier narrative than its predecessors, with plenty of cinematics interspersed with the action. "We have really gone to town with cut-scenes for this one," beams Blystad. "I think we started to develop different layers, some of them are on a gameplay level where if you listen to what secondary characters are saying you'll get more hints on where the story is going. But in the cut-scenes we really pushed the look of the game and the storytelling."

It seems like IO Interactive is doing everything right in reimagining Agent 47 for the current generation. Heading to stores in November, it remains to be seen whether the steely-eyed assassin has what it takes to neutralise the competition in a cluttered holiday season.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
Origin: Denmark
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: IO Interactive
Release: 20 November
Players: 1

Developer Profile

The Danish developer garnered praise for its innovative series of *Hitman* titles, the last of which was *Hitman: Blood Money* released in 2006. Apart from a quick distraction with the criminally overlooked *Mini Ninjas*, the developer has been keeping itself busy with the unhinged *Kane And Lynch* series.

Developer History

Kane And Lynch 2: Dog Days **2010 [Multi]**

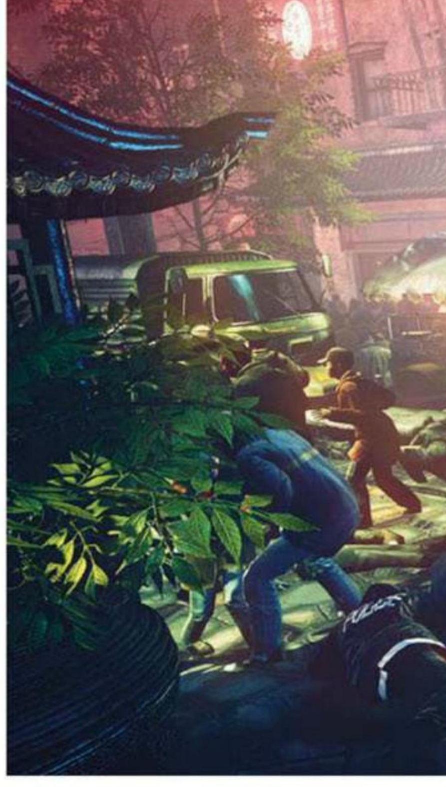
Mini Ninjas **2009 [Multi]**

Hitman: Blood Money **2006 [Multi]**

Hitman: Codename 47 **2000 [PC]**

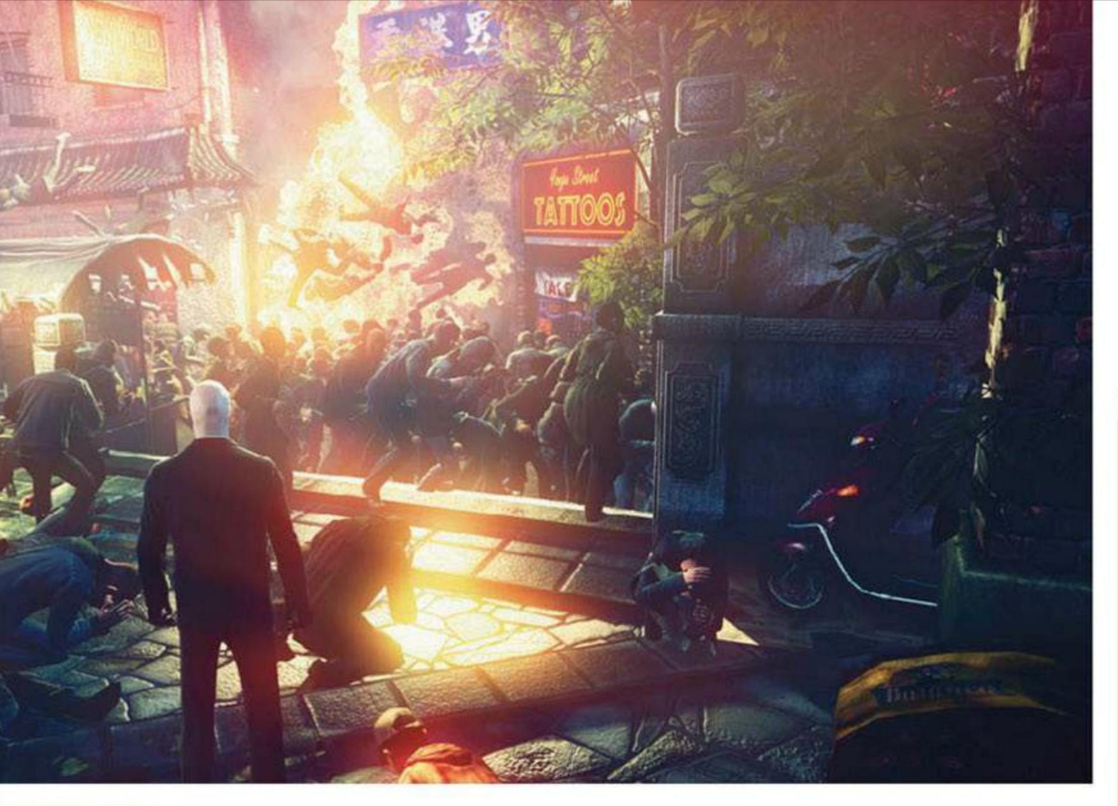
High Point

Hitman: Blood Money struck a delectable balance between taut espionage and icy malice, juxtaposed with the darkest of comedy.





■ Right: The King Of Chinatown mission takes place in a relatively compact area. However, it offers various precise avenues for Agent 47 to take down his target.



SEX AND DEATH

HITMAN: ABSOLUTION HAS been one piece of a two-part controversial maelstrom aimed at Square Enix over the past few months. The game received incensed criticism from journalists and fans alike, after IO Interactive released a trailer that featured leather-clad female assassins getting clobbered by Agent 47 in the rain. With the developers perhaps blithely ignorant to the overtones of misogyny, sadism and every other fifty shades of masochism, the fact is it was a sensationalist piece of marketing material to heighten the anticipation towards the game. Still, it paled in comparison to one of the comments made by a member of the *Tomb Raider* development team. In an interview during E3, it was intimated that Lara will have to fight off a sexual assault in a scenario designed to make players feel a need to protect her as a fragile woman.

IO Interactive has gone to town with the visuals, making sure that each new mission has its own distinct tone and atmosphere. It's by far the most aesthetically interesting entry in the franchise to date. Left: IO Interactive has assured **games**™ that *Absolution* will evenly balance action with stealth. Although, there's nothing wrong with a bit of pyrotechnics now and again, right?



1 SHUTTER: In Shutter, one player takes the role of a photographer and must snap pics of wanted criminals by holding up the GamePad and using its screen to zoom in on a great picture of their face. In practice, it actually plays a lot like Konami's old arcade game *Silent Scope*.



2 SNIPER GHOST WARIO: Shutter gets even more like a sniping game when you factor in another player. The job of this player is essentially to act as a spotter, pointing out where the next wanted criminal is on the TV screen, since the photographer is too occupied by their zoomed in GamePad view to notice quickly.



Game & Wario

CONCEPT A spin-off from the WarioWare series designed to show off the Wii U GamePad and get non-gamers involved in the fun without barrier to entry.

What would a new Nintendo system be without WarioWare?

When Nintendo announced that Nintendo Land would be used to demonstrate the unique capabilities of the Wii U GamePad we had to wonder why *WarioWare* – which traditionally adopts that role at the launch of a new Nintendo console – wouldn't be used to do the job. Little did we know the publisher had something a lot like that up its sleeve. *Game & Wario* is another mini game collection for Wii U and features all of the *WarioWare* cast and its humour. But, as the title suggests, it's a little different to traditional *WarioWare* titles, three-second micro games replaced by longer experiences that have more in common with something like Wii Play. Not only that, but *Game & Wario* does other interesting things with the GamePad, not least the fact that its multiplayer modes are designed so that other players can join in without having to use any controller at all. Which makes it perfect for curious "non-gamers" and relieves the burden of having to splash your hard-earned money on extra Wii Remotes. Here's our rundown of the four mini-games we've played so far...

3 FIND FRONK: Once all the criminals have been found in Shutter there's a quick bonus round where you're charged with finding Fronk, the tiny little yellow thing who crops up throughout the *WarioWare* series. He's tough to spot, even with a friend helping, so he'll net you a nice bonus. Can you see him in this screen?



INFORMATION

Details

Format: Wii U
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Release: Q4 2012
Players: 1-5

Wario Profile

Starting off as a villain in *Super Mario Land 2*, Wario very quickly developed a personality of his own and eventually became a platform for Nintendo's creativity, able to test new ideas in ways Mario just isn't able. He remains one of Nintendo's greatest assets to innovation.

Wario History

WarioWare DIY **2009 [DS]**
Wario Land: The Shake Dimension **2008 [Wii]**
Wario: Master Of Disguise **2007 [DS]**
Wario Blast: Featuring Bomberman! **1994 [Game Boy]**

High Point

Wario's greatest game remains WarioWare, a bold and inventive distillation of interactivity. If it had originated on DS it may very well have been titled Videogame Training. Top draw.









4 FRUIT: A MINI-GAME in which one player controls a character walking around a busy street, collecting a predetermined number of fruit. Clever players can take shortcuts through the street by ducking into manholes, while they can hide behind passing vehicles as they pick up fruit and even blend into a crowd.

5 GUESS WHO: :Why do players need to blend in? Because only they know which character they're controlling (they're privately selected on the GamePad screen first) and the other players have to guess who they were controlling at the end of the game. The better the player blends in, picking up fruit without being noticed, the greater their chance of success.

6 ARROW:A great callback to previous *WarioWare* mini-games, Arrow sees you firing nose projectiles at tiny on-screen Warios. Fail to stop their approach and they'll invade the screen of your GamePad where you'll have to tap them all to oblivion. In a nice touch you can tickle the nose arrow to make it do a big sneezy explosion shot.

7 SKI: The most simple of the *Game & Wario* mini-games we've played so far, Ski sees old *WarioWare* favourite Jimmy skiing downhill. The game's played completely on the GamePad, which you tilt from side to side in order to guide Jimmy downhill. The TV screen simply displays a 3D recreation for spectators to enjoy.







Persona 4 Arena

CONCEPT ■ Balancing on the fine edge of depth and accessibility, *Persona 4 Arena* promises fight fans with a genuinely engaging fighter.

Walkin' on a thin line...

■ Above: *Persona 4* will have a deep story mode, as well as a full set of tutorials, training and challenge mode to help you learn its nuances.
Below: A deep roster with characters that play in a good variety of styles is key to a successful fighting game. *Persona 4 Arena* excels here with a good mix of zone-controlling characters, close-up grapplers and rush-down fighters.



■ Above: As in any fighter meter, management is at the heart of winning matches. With both a Super Meter and a Persona Meter to think about, you'll have plenty to mind, but doing it right can have spectacular effects.

Fighting games in the modern era are, for the most part, walking upon something of a fine line. They come from a genre with a rich heritage of deep mechanics and often massively demanding fighting systems, especially when it comes to execution. Just like the martial arts characters of their beloved games, hardcore aficionados are often highly trained experts who can do arcane things with a fight stick that make combo-based magic appear on screen, and often virtually speak their own language to explain it all, often to the bewilderment of outsiders.

But the fighting genre also exists in a wider gaming world, and with the cost of development there's a great need, particularly for smaller developers, to appeal beyond their niche; to put it bluntly they have to grow their fan base, and find ways to encourage new players beyond the faithful.

The challenge is still providing enough depth to satisfy the hardcore, and giving new fans a path of mastery to follow. It's a narrow balance between depth and accessibility that's sharper than the keenest of blades – and clearly Arc Systems Works is very much aware of it in *Persona 4 Arena*. The gorgeously animated fighter is based on the Persona RPG series, with characters from the third and fourth games of the popular franchise. Arc System has tackled portraying these characters with gusto, producing such a high quality of animation that series fans will be in hog heaven. Every one of its thirteen strong character roster of fan favourites like swordsman Yu Narukami, detective Naoto Shirogane, kung fu obsessed girl Chie Satonaka and crazy living bear Teddie to name a few, are animated in such luscious detail it almost feels like you're watching an anime. There's an instant aesthetic appeal to it all with the kinds of outlandish looking attacks you can pull off, especially when you summon in your Persona, an often outrageous looking alter ego that fights alongside you.

> "Arc System Works has introduced a lot of interesting mechanics that make the game easier to learn"
> ROB STONE, ATLUS

/// That desire to truly represent the series and be accessible to its fans and more casual players, as well as traditional fighting fans is reflected in *Persona 4's* control scheme. It's based around four buttons, Strong Attack, Weak Attack, Strong Persona Attack and Weak Persona Attack. Using the regular attacks has



LEARNING THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS

WHILE SOME might see the ability to start a massive combo string by repeatedly hitting a single button as the ultimate crutch for button mashers, there is an apparent method to Arc Systems Works' madness and it does appear to be fairly balanced. While every character has this single button auto-combo string, if you're looking to do damage there are far more effective manually imputed combos. We suspect that they'll use your meter more efficiently as well, and to our minds they look far better – in fact some of the attacks you can do in *Persona 4* are incredibly satisfying to pull off. These auto combos will mostly serve as training wheels to newbies and experienced genre fans will generally have too much pride to use them.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Arcade,PlayStation 3,Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Zen United
Developer: Arc System Works
Release: Q3 2012 (Japan: 26 July 2012 /US: 07 August 2012)
Genre: Beat 'em up
Players: 2

Developer Profile

Arc Systems Works can be said to be a core part of the fighting developer new wave that has followed in the wake of *Street Fighter IV* and seen smaller Japanese developers becoming truly innovative with the genre. It's rightly renowned for the sheer beauty of its creations and fighter's animation.

Developer History

BlazBlue: Continuum Shift **2009 [Multi]**

BlazBlue Calamity Trigger **2008 [Multi]**

Guilty Gear X **2000 [PS2]**

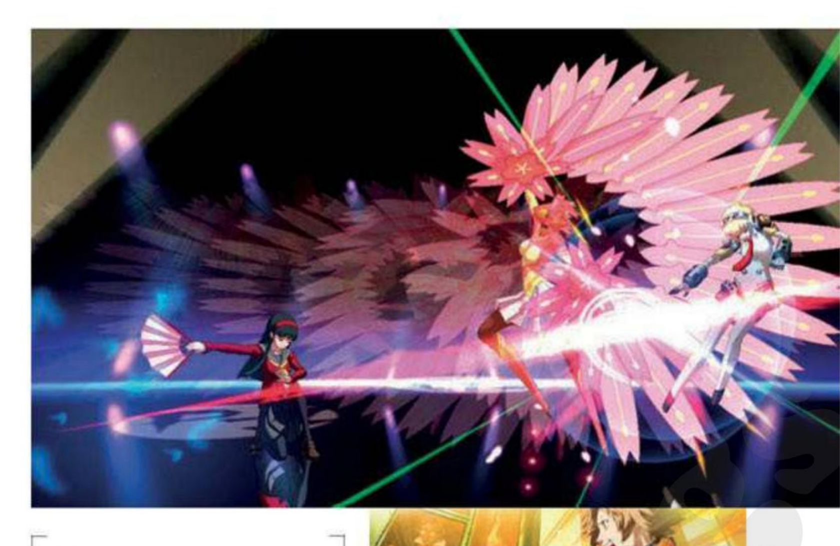
Guilty Gear **1998 [PS2]**

High PPSIt

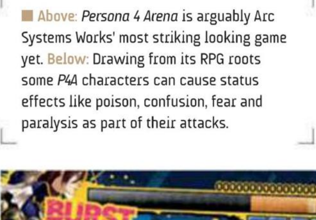
Shift built upon the framework of *Trigger* to cement Arc System Works' claim to fame as the developer that best mixes gorgeous presentation with deep gameplay.

your character lay into foes, but hitting your Persona Attacks has your Persona appear and instantly lash out as if they were an extension of your character. It's using your regular and Persona Attacks in tandem that allows you to pull off combos in Persona 4, and of course there are the traditional fighting game special moves, EX Attacks (called Skill Boosts) and Supers, all governed by a meter and generally pulled of by 'Fireball' style stick motions. Launchers, juggles, command grabs, dodges and cancels into other or Super attacks are all part of your basic repertoire. There are some fairly unique elements as well, like the way in which your Persona takes damage if hit, eventually retreating to regenerate. There are also combined character/Persona Attacks like the generally anti-air Furious Action attack, and an overhead attack that opens up your foe to a combo, which engulfs both characters in a cartoon cloud as you dish out damage. Arc System Works has made many of *Persona 4 Arena's* fighting game inputs far more forgiving, and a combo breaking Burst helps to ensure you've another way to escape punishing combos. But the developer has gone even further: in a controversial move you can start a combo string with a single attack button, and by repeatedly hitting it, with correct distance and timing, build all the way up into a Super. It's an addition that could drive the hardcore fans crazy, but struggling new players will appreciate it.

Whether Arc Systems Works has managed to walk that very fine line between accessibility and total depth will require more play, and as ever it'll be the very vocal online fighting community that will make the final decision, but so far the potential is certainly there, and it's games like this that promise to keep the genre feeling fresh.



■ Above: *Persona 4 Arena* is arguably Arc Systems Works' most striking looking game yet. Below: Drawing from its RPG roots some *P4A* characters can cause status effects like poison, confusion, fear and paralysis as part of their attacks.



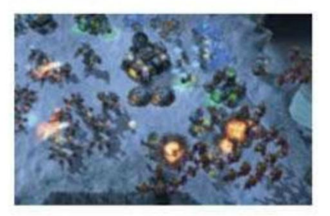


SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision Blizzard
Developer: In-House
ETA: September



WHEN YOU look at *StarCraft II*'s multiplayer game mechanics, they're like a set of highly polished and sharp as hell clockwork gears; if you don't know what you're doing, your opponent will cut you to ribbons with them. With *StarCraft II: Heart Of The Swarm*, Blizzard has added a slew of new units that evolve all these ideas while keeping the core foundations and ideas well and truly intact.

AMNESIA: A MACHINE FOR PIGS

Format: PC
Publisher: Frictional Games
Developer: In-House
ETA: 2013



DEVELOPER COLLABORATION is a gaming buzzword at the moment but *Amnesia: A Machine For Pigs*, the indirect sequel to *Amnesia : Dark Descent*, promises to be truly special. The indie developer behind *Dear Esther*, *thechineseroom*, and horror specialists Frictional Games are crafting a heart-stoppingly creepy survival horror game that cleverly uses first-person to immerse players in a horrific world.

OKAMI HD

Format: PlayStation 3
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
ETA: August



LIKE EVERYONE else, we were captivated by the gorgeously beautiful *Okami* on its original PS2 outing, so our hearts leapt at the idea of playing it in gloriously sharp high-definition. If what we've been shown bears out, this version of the game will not only use PlayStation Move to good effect, but also utilise the power of the PS3 to really bring *Okami*'s vibrant graphical style to life.

LITTLEBIGPLANET KARTING

Format: PS3
Publisher: Sony
Developer: United Front
ETA: December



UNITED FRONT is attempting to put a unique stamp on *LittleBigPlanet Karting*. Not only is it making it feel like an integral part of the *LittleBigPlanet* Universe that Media Molecule established, but it's adding adventure and platforming elements. These will be coupled with an extensive array of customisation options that promise to put even the rather excellent *Modnation Racers* to shame.

COMPANY OF HEROES 2

Format: PC
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic Entertainment
ETA: 2013



IT'S EASY to forget we won WWII because the Soviet Union bled the Nazi war machine dry at the cost of 8.7 million men. Recognising that is what gives Relic Entertainment's *Company Of Heroes 2* its most intriguing angle in terms of story, but the seriously innovative additions to the series' squad-based real-time strategy mechanics make it one of the most anticipated games of 2012.

COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

Format: 360
Publisher: Valve
Developer: In-House
ETA: August



FAR TOO many gamers seem to think the multiplayer modern military shooter was born with *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, but *Counter-Strike* had millions of gamers hooked with modern military hardware years before we took to *Call Of Duty* so fiercely. Finally, then, it's good to see Valve attempt to claim that crown back with an updated take on its classic shooter, while bringing it to the console in an accessible form.

NEVERWINTER

Format: PC
Publisher: Perfect World Entertainment
Developer: Cryptic Studios
ETA: December 2012



THERE ARE more than a few gamers out there with a fondness for the classic RPGs of old, and they're exactly who Cryptic Studios' *Neverwinter* looks set to court. As well as providing a worthy next chapter in the franchise, Cryptic is innovating in an interesting way, having decided to change the game into a free-to-play MMO with dynamic class-based combat designed to be more inviting.

PARTY WAVE

Format: iOS
Publisher: TBC
Developer: Mistwalker
ETA: September



DEVELOPERS OFTEN take on projects that are a reflection of their private passions, and *Final Fantasy VII* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's next game with Mistwalker Studios will be an IOS title based on one of his hobbies: surfing. *Party Waves* will see players guiding their surfer away from obstacles and attempting to catch the 'party wave' where they'll battle aquatic bad guys. Nuts but potentially brilliant.



DELAYED – Anarchy Reigns (Multi)

Platinum Games' crazy brawler *Anarchy Reigns* has been delayed by Sega until the first half of 2013, at least in Europe and America. Still all hope is not lost: it did come out in Japan on 5 July and that version supports multiple languages.



DELAYED – Far Cry 3 (Multi)

Ubisoft's first-person shooter set in a paradise full of people gone crazy has been delayed until November. According to the *Far Cry 3* development team, the delay is to create the 'best gameplay experience'.

METRO LAST LIGHT

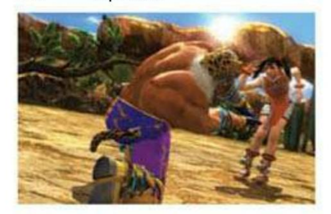
Format: **Xbox 360, PS3, PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **4A Games**
ETA: **2013**



IT OFTEN takes a good developer a second pass at an idea to really show off its potential, hence why it was a welcome surprise when THQ green-lit *Metro Last Light* – its faith in 4A Games is starting to pay off. This sequel has the polish and sophistication that *Metro 2033* was lacking, and is shaping up to be of a far higher quality with much greater depth than the usual 'dudebro' nonsense of the genre.

TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2

Format: **PS3**
Publisher: **Namco Bandi**
Developer: **In-House**
ETA: **September**



IT'S A return to the Iron Fist Tournament and one of the biggest games in *Tekken* history: *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*. Not only will we see a return to the ever-popular fast-paced tag combat of the series, but Namco Bandai has revealed a roster of over fifty characters from across the franchise. With *Tekken Tag Tournament* being separate from the series' canon, this should be another solid entry in the franchise.

SUPER SMASH BROS 4

Format: **Wii U**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Namco Bandai/Project Sora**
ETA: **2013**



GAMEPLAY DETAILS are scant, but the surprising announcement that *Super Smash Bros 4* is in development at Namco Bandai makes it instantly interesting. Nintendo is co-opting with the Japanese studio, with *Smash Bros.* creator Masahiro Sakurai leading as game director and joined by Yoshito Higuchi and Tetsuya Akatsuka. According to Sakurai, Namco Bandai's *SSB4* prototype "looks pretty good."

END OF NATIONS

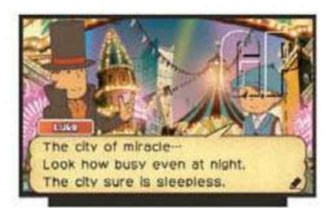
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Trion Worlds**
Developer: **Petroglyph**
ETA: **September**



End Of Nations will combine the fast-paced action and strategy of an RTS with the persistence, progression and social features of an MMO as it throws thousands of players online into battle against its NPC faction, the Order of Nations. It's looking increasingly impressive, and will feature both a free-to-play offering and more feature-filled, traditional subscriber package.

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE MIRACLE MASK

Form: **3DS**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Level 5**
ETA: **December**



With *Professor Layton*'s first outing on the 3DS finally coming to the West, the handheld version will delve into the star's university years, using the device's 3D to toy with a few puzzles just a tad. Not only does this allow it to have an atmospheric effect, bringing the environment to life, but the way it has been used means there's far more scope for it to be a touch more challenging too.

FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

Format: **3DS**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Intelligent Systems**
ETA: **December**



WE'LL ADMIT to little jumps of joy that *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is finally getting a Western release. It introduces a slew of new mechanics, including the ability for characters to get married and have children and for players to swap characters with each other via Streetpass, all of which promise to affect the player emotionally. With the returning perma-death mode, life has never felt so fragile.

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES DUEL

Format: **PC Browser**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-House**
ETA: **December**



SEGA'S *VALKYRIA Chronicles* series is set to return in the form of *Duel*, a new browser-based and free-to-play edition of the franchise. Players build up a battalion by collecting cards and throwing them into battle before taking control of enemy territories and engaging in the series' traditional 3D character fights. It has the potential to be one of the years more interesting, and popular, free-to-play titles.

GUILD WARS 2

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **NCsoft**
Developer: **ArenaNet**
ETA: **December**



GUILD WARS' slightly ahead of its time and accessible approach to the MMO was what garnered it such a hardcore following. That looks set to continue in *Guild Wars 2*, especially where PVP is concerned, as it creates a more level playing-field, with combat relying on player skill more than the level-dependent stats under the hood. That means you'll be fighting other players right from the start.

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

JOE DANGER TOUCH!

Format: iOS
Publisher: Hello Games
Developer: In-house
ETA: TBA 2012



HELLO GAMES may have said that there'd be no more Joe Danger after this year's 'The Movie', but that hasn't stopped it from announcing *Joe Danger Touch!* for iOS. Developed specifically for the iPhone and iPad, the smartest decision made by the studio is that there's no virtual joystick – this is a purely swipe, flick, tap and hold affair. With the promise that nothing will be repurposed, this should be decent.

UNCHAINBLADES EXXIV

Format: 3DS/PSP
Publisher: FuRyu
Developer: In-house
ETA: TBA 2012



A SEQUEL to the niche but very much respected *UnchainBlades Rexx*, FuRyu recently announced that Yoshitaka Amano, well-known for his illustration work on the Final Fantasy series, will be contributing to the sequel. Scheduled for November in Japan, and potentially unlikely for a European release, the developer is, intelligently, simply looking to build on what made last year's entry a success.

STUDENTS OF ROUND: THE ETERNAL LEGEND

Format: PSP
Publisher: Kadokawa Games
Developer: Experience
ETA: October 2012 (Japan)



YOU MAY have thought your PSP was dead, its last remaining purpose to scare off any would- be burglars, but the announcement that 2010 Xbox 360 RPG *Students Of The Round* is coming to Sony's old handheld changes all that. While the majority remains identical to the very heavily influenced JRPG, new voice actors, an interface that actually works and some other 'surprising' features give you reasons to be excited.

LEARN WITH POKÉMON: TYPING ADVENTURE

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Genius Sonority
ETA: September 2012



DESPITE BEING somewhat of a ridiculous move when *House Of The Dead* did it over a decade ago (and we're aware there's far more examples) Pokémon has decided now is the time to follow suit. Out for well over a year already in Japan, *Learn With Pokémon: Typing Adventure* comes with a Bluetooth keyboard so you can catch them all by quickly typing things. It's a fanboy's dream.

007 LEGENDS

Format: 360/PS3/PC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Eurocom
ETA: 16 October 2012



EXCEPTIONALLY ODD given just how quiet Activison has been surrounding it, *007 Legends* – the James Bond game where you get to play through 'memorable' missions – will contain some content from On Her Majesty's Secret Service, the George Lazenby film only really remembered for being his sole take on the role. Still, if you're a big fan of the franchise, this may provide an evening's entertainment.

THE EXPENDABLES 2

Format: 360/PS3/PC
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-house
ETA: August 2012



15 YEARS ago *The Expendables 2* videogame would have been the biggest release of the summer. In 2012, though, publishers are far smarter, and a twin-stick co-op shooter designed for Xbox Live arcade and PSN makes more sense. Although this will probably be nothing more than canon fodder, the chance to play as Sly or Lundgren is enough to, at the very least, get you immaturely excited.

CAPTAIN ANTARCTICA

Format: iOS
Publisher: FDG Entertainment
Developer: Ideal Bureaucracy
ETA: August 2012



WE OPENLY admit we were sold on this because of the name, but *Captain Antarctica* is the latest bizarre game to head to iOS. When a penguin's wife gets kidnapped, he has to eat a lot of fish to get her back. There's nothing here that's exceptionally out of the ordinary – the vast majority is traditional platforming fodder – but it's bonkers. That in itself could make it worth a little bit of your time.

POKÉMON BLACK 2/WHITE 2

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
ETA: 12 October 2012



THE FRANCHISE that will truly never die continues to be a huge success as Nintendo confirms that *Pokémon Black 2* and *Pokémon White 2* will land on European shores in October. Perhaps more interestingly than this is the 3DS app known as *Pokémon Dream Radar* that will open up the opportunity to catch Pokemon using AR codes. These can then be transferred across to either of the aforementioned games. Nice.



DELAYED – Crimson Dragon (Xbox 360)

It may be one of the Kinect games people are actually excited about, but Sega recently delayed *Crimson Dragon* from the end of this year with no new release date set. Keep your fingers crossed.



DELAYED – Sam Suede (PC)

Originally set out to be a Kickstarter project, Wisecrack Games has cancelled *Sam Suede* after a few questionable and confusing titbits of information. Wisecrack has promised it will be back soon.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI IV

Format: 3DS
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: 4A Games
ETA: TBA 2013



A LOT of people take their *Shin Megami Tensei* very seriously, especially as this recently announced 'proper' sequel has been on many most wanted lists since *III* on the PS2. That's almost a decade ago. Teased for the 3DS so far with nothing more than a website and some moody concept art which insinuates that events will unfold in a post-apocalyptic world, a select few are already salivating for this.

FARMVILLE 2

Format: Facebook
Publisher: Zynga
Developer: In-house
ETA: TBA 2012



OH JOY of joys a new *Farmville* is coming, complete with 3D graphics and the decision to deny users from carrying over goods from the first. We all know where this is heading. While the visual sheen will give players a new way to view their farm, the real selling point will come thanks to the new social tools, such as harvesting your crops and then using said crops to build other necessities for your farm.

THE LAST OF US

Format: PS3
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Naughty Dog
ETA: TBA 2013



WHILE *THE Last Of Us* slowly plods towards launch, Naughty Dog has officially confirmed that it will not feature two-player co-op in its main campaign. Why not is anyone's guess – having two lead characters throughout seems to almost insist upon it – but the developer has promised multiplayer in other guises. With all that in mind, we imagine Ellie will die. This, however, is pure speculation.

GEARS OF WAR: JUDGMENT

Format: 360
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: PeopleCanFly/Epic Games
ETA: February 2013



CONFIRMED FOR 2013 already, numerous online retailer listings and publisher sources seem to insinuate that *Gears Of War: Judgment* is heading our way in February. While this may seem like an odd time for a *Gears* game to release, it's yet another sign that Microsoft is potentially preparing a new Xbox reveal for E3 with a launch a few months after that. Why get such a big, new title out the door so early?

EARTH DEFENSE FORCE 3: PORTABLE

Format: PSVita
Publisher: D3
Developer: Sandlot
ETA: 27 September (Japan)



COME THIS September, Japanese gaming folk will be able to take their EDF experience on the go as *Earth Defense Force* finally comes to the PSVita. Complete with a multitude of Vita-exclusive features, it will, thankfully, support four player multiplayer. D3 hasn't ruled it out heading over this way, and given the often pleasant reception previous iterations get we think it will.

DEVIL SUMMONER: SOUL HACKERS

Format: 3DS
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Intelligent Systems
ETA: 30 August 2012 (Japan)



IF YOU have any memories of the original *Devil Summoner* way back in 1997 on the Sega Saturn we will be very impressed. Your recollection power is to be rewarded, though, as Atlus has recently announced that *Soul Hackers* is being ported to the Nintendo 3DS. Getting a complete reworking to move it into the 21st Century, full voice acting, improved loading times and new battle animations are included.

EDEN TO GREEEEN

Format: Android
Publisher: iNiS
Developer: In-house
ETA: TBA 2012



NEXT FROM the minds behind *Elite Beat Agents* comes *Eden To GREEEEN*, a tower offence game powered by, of all things, the Unreal Engine. Seemingly designed to make the most out of Google's forthcoming Nexus 7 tablet, machines have invaded Eden and you've got to fight back by planting flowers that will both attack and defend. Imagine a more free-flowing *Plants Vs Zombies*...

OF ORCS AND MEN

Format: 360/PS3/PC
Publisher: Focus Home Interactive/Warner Bros.
Developer: In-house
ETA: August 2012



OUR BIGGEST problem with *Of Orcs And Men* is that we should be but weeks from its release and we don't yet know many people that have experienced it. A recently released batch of new screens is proof enough that it's still on course to come out, but we have a very distinct feeling that this, at its best, will be nothing more than average. Possibly one to avoid.



40 ORIGINAL FRANCHISES THAT WILL REVOLUTIONISE GAMING

BEYOND: TWO SOULS
THE LAST OF US
WATCH DOGS
FORTNITE
SLEEPING DOGS
BLACK KNIGHTS
PROJECT P-100
PAPA & YO

THE LAST GUARDIAN
DISHONORED
DEVIL'S THIRD
KILLER IS DEAD
CYBERPUNK
CRIMSON DRAGON
TIME & ETERNITY
SUPER TIME FORCE
DUST 514
HAWKEN

NEW BLOOD

Is the videogame landscape really just littered with sequels and the same tired old ideas? Some cynical commentators may have you believe that, but the truth is actually much more optimistic. The next year is set to bring a wealth of new IPs and fresh ideas that deserve to go on your wish list today. **games™** has, over the page, selected 40 of the finest to look forward to. And while some of them do have numbers in the title, not a single one is a sequel…



The relationship between Joel and Ellie is key to both the story and gameplay in *The Last Of Us*

THE LAST OF US

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Naughty Dog **ETA:** Spring 2013

1 *Crash Bandicoot. Jak and Daxter. Uncharted.* Naughty Dog may well be the king when it comes to ensuring a new IP finds a level of success. **games™** sat down with lead designer, Neil Druckmann, to see if *The Last Of Us* can follow the trend…

How difficult is it to steer away from *Uncharted* while retaining elements that have made it such a success?
It's an interesting challenge as… we always want to do something new and… Sony gives us a lot of freedom. When we were approached with this opportunity to do a new game we could do whatever we wanted and we were really drawn to this idea of *The Last Of Us* and developing this game around these two characters – [it] allowed us to have a very unique take on survival action. At the same time, Naughty Dog is known for story and pushing the edges of what graphics are capable on consoles and all platforms, combining narrative and gameplay, and they're always elements that are going to be part of a Naughty Dog game… When people get their hands on *The Last Of Us* they're going to feel something that's very unique.

Do you feel that there's a risk of launching new IP now so late into the PlayStation 3's life cycle?
I think there's a risk of launching a new IP at any point on console… Again, going back to working at Naughty Dog, people know us and expect certain things so the fanbase knows the kind of experience they might expect and then it's our job to keep it fresh and keep surprising them. As far as it being this late, we still have a few tricks up our sleeves and we have some of the smartest developers in the industry – we're developing a whole new lightning engine that's going to give people a kind of look you've never seen in a game before. There's soft shadows you haven't seen and we've developed a whole new AI. We're really pushing for a smart, intelligent AI that works in groups that surprises and flanks you and make you feel like you're fighting other humans.

There's certainly evidence to prove that Naughty Dog has a formula when creating a new IP. What's the secret?

THE SECRET IS WE'RE MAKING THE GAME WE WANT TO PLAY AND THERE'S NO GAME LIKE THIS OUT THERE

I think the secret is that we pick things that we are really passionate about. After every project we never say we're going to make the sequel, When we finished *Uncharted*, it was never a given that we were going to *Uncharted 2*. We sat down and we said what can we do with Nathan Drake or what we can do with this thing that will make it unique and keep us motivated… You want to come in and out, work late hours and be really stoked about what you're making and that's how we approached *The Last Of Us*. We took months to find the idea and cultivate it, find these characters and eventually we fell in love with Joel and Ellie and the journey they were going to go on. The secret is we're making the game we want to play and there's no game like this out there so we're going to work our asses off so we get to play it.

There must be outside pressures, though, from publishers, for example, who want to see how lucrative it can be over a longer period?

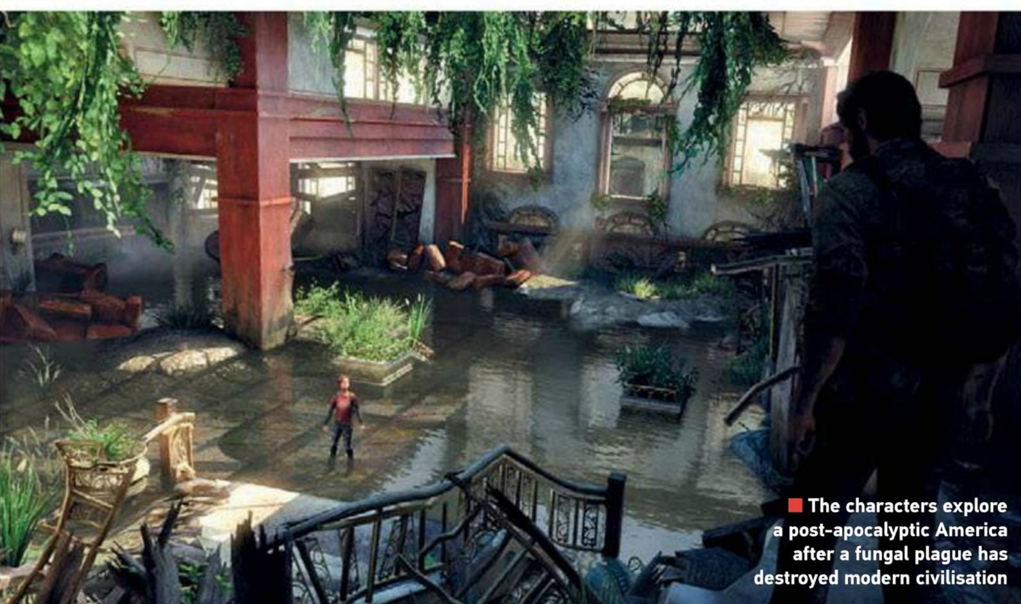












The characters explore a post-apocalyptic America after a fungal plague has destroyed modern civilisation

There's always a lot of pressure to make a sequel, especially when something you make is a successful… Is it difficult to make a story that stands on its own?
Yes, but again, working at Naughty Dog gives us an advantage because we have that loyal fanbase that will come and at least be interested. If you're less known it's probably a lot harder and we always leave ourselves open to make a sequel. We can tell you that the journey Ellie and Joel go on… we're not fans of cliff-hangers. This story ends at the end of *The Last Of Us*.

How do you ensure that with such an emphasis on two characters battling the odds together, it doesn't become nothing more than an escort mission?
Ellie has to be very capable for it not to be an escort mission. One of the early decisions we struggled with when we started on [it] was do you give Ellie commands? Do you get her to pick up a brick or throw it? Do you call for help and she'll come and stab someone in the back? That just became a lot less interesting to us because she was more of an automaton than a character. So for us it was like how do we make her a compelling character that can surprise you? What you saw in the E3 demo, for example, of Ellie throwing the brick, that's a dynamic thing that can happen anywhere if she happens to find a brick. If you run out of bullets and she has the opportunity, she's going to help you out. That makes it more than an escort mission for me because the job of the story, the characters, the animation, the dialogues, the actors and everything else is to sell you on caring for all of this – when you start caring for them and they can surprise you, then you're invested in it.

Given that, did you ever consider adding in a full co-op campaign?
Yeah, we did consider it and we even considered it for some of the previous *Uncharted* games, but we always came back to this thing of how it limits what we can do with the story and the characters… For example, if you play co-op, Joel can never be alone. The characters can't be separated from each other for too long and that reduces the surprises you can have within the story. We don't want it to be a case of playing with your buddy and saying 'Okay, you go hide over there, get that brick, then when I fight this guy come around and throw it'. It's like, I see my buddy there, I don't see Ellie and that, for us, lost what this game is about: the relationship between these two characters where you don't really know where it's going to go or the emotional state Ellie is going to be in.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: Uncharted, The Walking Dead, Fallout 3

PROJECT P-100

Format: Wii U **Publisher:** Nintendo
Developer: Platinum Games
ETA: November 2012

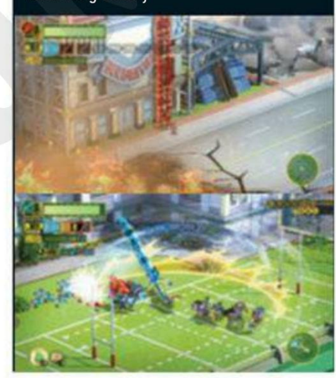
2 **Anyone complaining that Nintendo doesn't have any new ideas or new characters planned for Wii U just isn't looking close enough.** Though we'd forgive you for not noticing this one. It was absent from Nintendo's E3 presentation and that name, presumably a working title, doesn't do it any favours. But with Platinum Games (*Bayonetta*, *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*) at the helm, *Project P-100* is a title every gamer should keep their eye on.

This particular Platinum Games project is being directed and produced by Hideki Kamiya and Atsushi Inaba, the same pairing that made *Viewtiful Joe* under Capcom, and the similarities between the two colourful TV superhero games are clear, at least on a visual level. Yet the gameplay is entirely different. This action strategy game has elements of *Pikmin*: you wander through a town and recruit civilians, transforming them into superheroes before they join your mass of troops, and then control them as one. A GamePad gesture transforms your superheroes into one object – whether it be a giant fist or gun, for combat, or a human ladder or giant paper plane, to traverse the environment.

During **games™**'s limited hands-on with *Project P-100* there was at least enough time to confirm that Platinum's verve for originality and fun is still alive. But there's also a feeling that we have so much more to learn about this intriguing new game.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: Viewtiful Joe, Pikmin, Little King's Story





CRIMSON DRAGON

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Microsoft **Developer:** Grounding **ETA:** Autumn 2012

3

Kinect may not have entirely made good on its promise but if there's one thing it has done well, it's introducing new IP to the world. *The Gunstringer, Child Of Eden, Dance Central* and *Diabolical Pitch* have all been created because of Kinect and that trend looks set to continue with *Crimson Dragon* – which may well end up being the best game on Kinect. *Child Of Eden* is one of the best uses of Kinect we've seen to date, and this follows a very similar gameplay model, combined with the beautiful aesthetic of *Panzer Dragoon.*

Crimson Dragon creator Yukio Futatsugi tells us, "My favourite thing is that I could make a new hardcore game for Kinect. Originally the Kinect launched with only easy games, casual sports etc. But in *Crimson Dragon*, after people clear the game, they will unlock 'hard' mode and hard missions. This is the real *Crimson Dragon*. Enemies attack faster, and it's important to know which skills to use."

A decade after the last *Panzer Dragoon*, we are more than ready for the challenge.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Panzer Dragoon, Child Of Eden, Phantom Dust

TIME & ETERNITY

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Namco Bandai **Developer:** Image Epoch **ETA:** Autumn 2013

4

If you're impressed by the look of Level-5's *Ni No Kuni* then prepare to be blown away by *Time & Eternity*. While *Ni No Kuni* uses clever cel-shading techniques to replicate the look of its anime cut-scenes, *Time & Eternity* uses real cel animation throughout the whole of the game, even in real-time 3D gameplay. How the development team has pulled it off we can't imagine, but the results are so irresistibly beautiful we just don't care.

The game itself features a girl called Toki who suffers from a split personality disorder. In battle this results in a physical transformation that sees rifle-wielding redhead Toki change into the fist-fighting blonde Towa in times of high risk and low health. So it seems we can look forward to a clever battle system as well as those stunning visuals.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Ni No Kuni, Tales Of Vesperia, Valkyria Chronicles





BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

Format: 3DS **Publisher:** Square Enix **Developer:** Silicon Studio **ETA:** October 2012

5

Square Enix is well known for its stupidly titled games but, as daft as it might sound, *Bravely Default* kind of makes sense. In this classic-style JRPG, players can adopt three different battle stances: normal, brave and default. A little like the system in *Dragon Quest IX*, these build up your characters' powers but are also used in relation to the stances adopted by opponents, making for a battle system more tactical than most.

Complex battle rules aside, *Bravely Default* will mostly appeal for the way it recaptures the feeling of pre-*FFVII Final Fantasy* games, particularly with a world that recalls *FF*s *III* and *IV* as well as a Job system straight out of *FFV*. From Silicon Studio, the developer that brought us the nostalgic *3D Dot Game Heroes*, *Bravely Default* is certainly in the right hands.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes Of Light, Dragon Quest IX, Final Fantasy V

DISHONORED

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC **Publisher:** Bethesda Softworks **Developer:** Arkane Studios **ETA:** 12 October

6

Despite its encompassing stories, monstrous creations and rabbiting villagers, the main character in each of Bethesda's sprawling epics has always has been the world itself. *Dishonored*'s steampunk, neo-Victorian backdrop might not match the breathtaking scale of Skyrim or *Fallout*'s Wasteland, but it's no less a dense and thriving landscape.

One small district within the city of Dunwall provides a multitude of avenues for metal-mug protagonist Corvo to reach one of his assassination targets. You have the choice to possess one of the rats currently festering down one of the many dank alleyways – which enable players to access small passageways – or you can simply scale buildings parkour-style and gain a vertical vantage point. Missions are linear, environments focused, but each offers a wealth of opportunities to explore and facilitate various gameplay styles.

Superficially, *Dishonored* leans towards stealth, but combat is grubby, visceral and satisfying for those who dive into the sword-and-magic action. Heads fly, rats nibble at the flesh of a recently immolated body and supernatural abilities provide an advantage with0out ever undermining the difficulty. It's fair to say that *Dishonored* is shaping up to be a rare beast: a game that's whatever you want it to be.

Anticipation Rating: 10

FOR FANS OF: Deus Ex, BioShock, Thief



KILLER IS DEAD

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Kadokawa Games
Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture **ETA:** Late 2013



7 **Another crazy new game from Grasshopper Manufacture.** *Killer Is Dead* has similarities to past Grasshopper games – the beam sword from *No More Heroes*, the hired assassin themes of *Killer7* – but it's actually a brand new title. The story concerns an Executioner whose job is to kill off 'S level' criminals around the world.

Environments range from futuristic cityscapes to ancient Japanese temples with cherry blossom blowing in the wind. If Grasshopper's artists are able to achieve the level of detail and beauty outlined in its concept art then *Killer Is Dead* will be a beautiful game if nothing else.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Killer7, Lollipop Chainsaw, No More Heroes



RODEA THE SKY SOLDIER

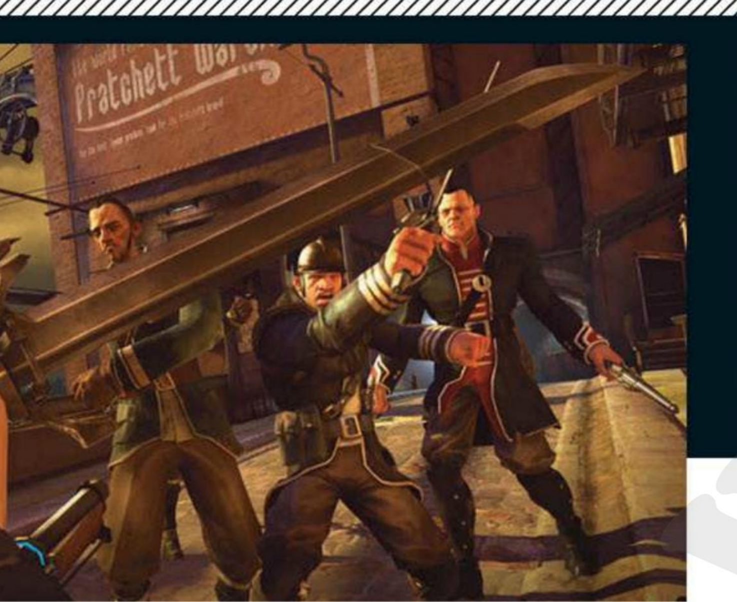
Format: Wii, 3DS **Publisher:** Kadokawa Games **Developer:** Prope **ETA:** ?

8 **When Yuji Naka left Sega to create his own studio, he did so in part to regain the creative freedom he enjoyed during the heyday of Sonic Team during the Saturn and Dreamcast eras.** To a certain extent he's accomplished that with a string of new IPs and fresh ideas.

Rodea looks like a dream project for Naka fans. It most obviously recalls the flying action of *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and combines it with some arcade-like shooting action. The game was actually completed well over a year ago now but has been sitting on the shelves with publisher Kadokawa games, without explanation. Our suspicion is that the collapse of the Wii market has led the publisher to re-evaluate *Rodea*. So let's hope that at least the 3DS version sees the light of day along with a Wii U port of the Wii game.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: NiGHTS Into Dreams, Kid Icarus: Uprising, Sin & Punishment









BEYOND: TWO SOULS

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Quantic Dream **ETA:** Late 2013

9 **David Cage is a man on a mission.** With three games under his belt – *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*, *Fahrenheit* and *Heavy Rain* – the Quantic Dream CEO has spent his career with one singular goal: to master the art of cinematic storytelling in interactive form. With every step he's taken a huge stride forward, and *Beyond: Two Souls* looks to be just as important.

Back when **games™** interviewed Cage about *Heavy Rain*, the designer told us that Hollywood talent was yet to be convinced by videogames because the technology wasn't quite there to allow their performances to show through the rubber masks of videogame characters. But with *Heavy Rain*, the tide began to change. Rockstar's *LA Noire* attracted significant TV talent and used them exceptionally well, and now Ellen Page (*Inception*, *Juno*) has taken the starring role in *Beyond*, her visage replicated close to perfectly so that her character and emotion can take centre stage.

Crucially, *Beyond* also takes leaps forward in interactivity. While the focus will still be on the player's influence over a story, a possession mechanic similar to that used in *Ghost Trick* should open up the opportunities for game design significantly.

And, you know what? This is Quantic Dream's fourth new IP in a row. How many other developers can match that?

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Heavy Rain, The Walking Dead, Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective



SLEEPING DOGS

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC **Publisher:** Square Enix
Developer: United Front Games **ETA:** 17 August

10 ***Sleeping Dogs* has had something of a tumultuous development.** Activision announced the game as a new instalment in the *True Crime* series before canning the project mid-development, only for Square Enix to acquire the rights shortly after. Yet, while Activision shoehorned it into a larger franchise, senior producer Jeff O'Connell informs **games™** that the inception was always as an original product.

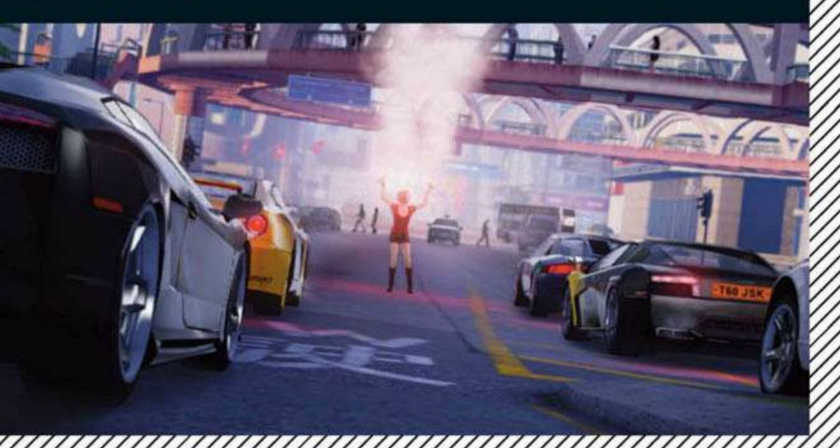
"We really started to develop this way back in 2007 as a new IP," he explains. "We wanted to do something different in terms of the mechanics, and make them deeper and more enjoyable than any other urban, open-world game out there."

It's an ambitious undertaking for the studio best known for *ModNation Racers*. Not only is United Front exhaustively crafting a faithful facsimile of Hong Kong, but the developer is also balancing several intricate game mechanics to deliver a comprehensive gameplay experience.

"What we wanted to do was create a seamless mix between fighting, shooting, driving and then driving combat," O'Connell details. "It's not an easy task, but we feel like we've accomplished it because of the incredibly talented group of designers that we put together. We've got designers from Rockstar's *Bully*, the *Need For Speed* series and guys who have worked on other open-world games too, like *The Godfather* and *Mercenaries*. So we have a perfect group of experienced people who have put their heads together and made a system that is seamless."

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Grand Theft Auto, Stranglehold, True Crime



SHOOTMANIA: STORM

Format: PC **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Developer:** Nadeo **ETA:** September 2012

11 **Nadeo's inimitable 'Mania' brand of PC games prides itself on its leftfield inventiveness and *ShootMania: Storm* is no different in that respect**. The fundamentals of the game are deceptively simple: players are loaded with one gun, a two-hit health limit and have to capture the enemy's base in each of the user-generated stages. The lightning-fast pace and cunning skill is reminiscent of *Quake*, splashed with vibrant colour, with players outfitted with *Tron*-like neon gimp suits. Where this differs from Nadeo's previous Mania entry *TrackMania*, is that the gameplay itself holds as much interest as the creative results of the community.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Quake III, TrackMania, LittleBigPlanet



CYBERPUNK

Format: PC **Publisher:** TBA **Developer:** CD Projekt **ETA:** Late 2013

12 **Following the success of CD Projekt's *The Witcher* series, the studio's next is based on Mike Pondsmith's classic Eighties pen-and-paper RPG series *Cyberpunk*.** While details are thin on the ground for this adaptation, CD Projekt has stated that the game will be a new IP aimed at the burgeoning market for mature RPGs, so while you can expect a bounty of female breasts, there will also be an intense focus on non-linear storytelling and deep RPG mechanics. It's early days for the development, but given the striking craftsmanship the studio showcased on the two *The Witcher* titles to date, Pondsmith's vivid *Cyberpunk* fantasy is in safe hands.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: The Witcher, Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Syndicate



RETRO CITY RAMPAGE

Format: Wii, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC, PS Vita **Publisher:** D3 Publisher
Developer: Brian Provinciano **ETA:** Summer 2012

13 **Brian Provinciano's unashamed love letter to the videogames industry is more than just a parade of obsequious winks and inventive referencing of gaming royalty.** Yes, *Bomberman*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *The Legend Of Zelda* all receive their due reverence, but the game slots allusions to *Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars* and *The Dark Knight* neatly alongside the retro gaming tributes. All dressed in 8-bit glory, each pop-culture reference is both spoofed and revered in equal measure. But Provinciano's open-world is more than just an exhibition of gaming nostalgia: it also acts as a deconstruction of tropes and idioms rife across the industry.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: Grand Theft Auto, Metal Gear, The Legend Of Zelda



SUPER T.I.M.E FORCE

Format: PC **Publisher**: Capybara Games
Developer: In-house **ETA:** Late 2012

14 **If Capybara Games' *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery* was a beautiful experiment and *Might & Magic: Clash Of Heroes HD* a delectable hybrid of *Puzzle Quest* and *Advance Wars*, then what can we expect from its latest offspring, *Super T.I.M.E Force*?** Well, a ferocious side-scrolling shoot-'em-up first and foremost. But, of course, there's much more beneath the fiery pixels blasting across the screen at an eye-watering rate. The game throws impossible odds at the player, resulting in death and a respawn alongside your previous incarnation. Eventually, after several failed attempts, you'll battle alongside multiple versions of your character, finding the joint power of your squad enough to overcome the brutality of the mission. Dressed in the chic 8-bit art style, it's bound to frustrate and elate in equal measure.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Contra, Braid, Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP

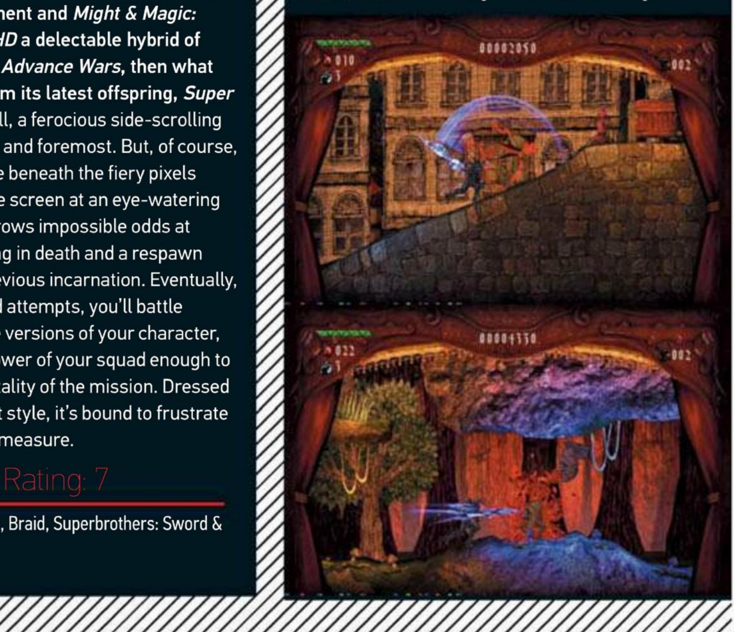
BLACK KNIGHT SWORD

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Digital Reality
Developer: Grasshopper, Digital Reality **ETA:** Late 2012

15 **The second collaboration between the assiduous Grasshopper Manufacture and Digital Reality,** ***Black Knight Sword*** is another digital offering that matches the quirky stylings of the former with the Western sensibilities of the latter. The side-scrolling rip-'em-up has a unique aesthetic, with an eccentric Japanese paper-theatre-style presentation – the action remains static, while the background moves behind the player. Well, you'd expect nothing less from Grasshopper.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Strider, Mega Man, Clockwork Knight





THE UNFINISHED SWAN

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Giant Sparrow **ETA:** Early 2013

16 **It's not all black and white with *The Unfinished Swan*.** A game promoting a simple concept – throwing globs of paint over a white environment, forming shapes that guide the player through the world – and utilising Sony's much-maligned motion controller, Move, *The Unfinished Swan* is more than an arresting tech demo. The attention-grabbing art direction dominates the design, but equal care and attention has been put into soundtrack, juxtaposing the whimsical, storybook world with a menacing tension. Indeed, while Sony is keeping shtum about exact details, expect a couple of splashes of red to help define this mysterious new world.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Portal 2, Flower, Datura



DUST 514

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony Online
Developer: CCP Games **ETA:** Late 2012



17 **Gamers are eagerly anticipating the expansion to the first-person shooter offshoot of MMORPG *EVE Online*.** *Dust 514* will be connected to *Eve Online*'s single-shared server, allowing players between the two games to interact immediately – for instance, *Dust 514* troops can call *EVE Online* players to provide an orbital bombardment during a skirmish. If CCP's gamble pays off, expect a colossal gaming community unlike any other.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: EVE Online, Starhawk, Star Wars: Battlefront



HAWKEN

Format: PC **Publisher:** Meteor Entertainment
Developer: Adhesive Games **ETA:** 12 December

18 **Indie development house Adhesive Games has developed a mech-combat game with real mettle.** This hefty multiplayer shooter features giant mechs that lumber under the player's control – but without sacrificing the fluidity of combat.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Unreal Tournament, MechWarrior, Steel Battalion



RYSE

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Microsoft
Developer: Crytek **ETA:** Summer 2013

19 **It dropped off the gaming radar shortly after its announcement at E3 back in 2011, but *Ryse* is very much alive and kicking.** In fact, you have to be both alive and kicking to play this Kinect-only brawler, with Microsoft promising a bloodbath for players prepared to stab their way through ancient Rome.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Rise Of Nightmares, Shadow Of Rome, God Of War



SKULLS OF THE SHOGUN

Format: Xbox 360, PC, Windows Phone **Publisher:** Microsoft **Developer:** 17-Bit **ETA:** Autumn 2012

20 **On the surface, *Skulls Of The Shogun* is nothing more than an interesting turn-based strategy game seemingly inspired by the likes of *Advanced Wars*.** That it can be played over XBLA, Windows 8 and Windows Phone, to the point that you can continue the same game on one format before picking it up on another, means this could be the start of something big for Microsoft.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Advance Wars, Naked War, Warrior's Lair



DRAGON'S CROWN

Format: PlayStation 3, PS Vita **Publisher:** Atlus **Developer:** Vanillaware **ETA:** Early 2013

21 **Few would imagine that Atlus would stick by an idea initially conceived in 1999, but director George Kamitani is clearly keen to buck the trend.** Formulated after forgotten Saturn game *Princess Crown* was released, *Dragon's Crown* continues to live in the past by attempting to reboot the side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre, spiced up just enough thanks to, as ever, a smattering of RPG goodness.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Golden Axe, Streets Of Rage, Muramasa: The Demon Blade

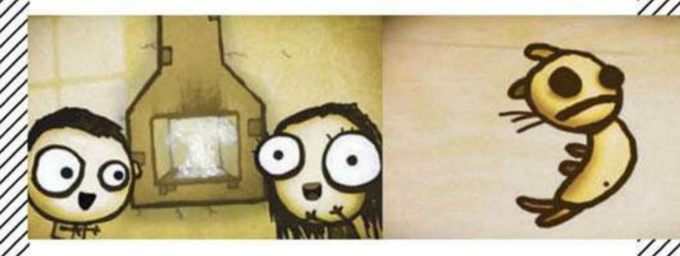
DEVIL'S THIRD

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 **Publisher:** TBA
Developer: Valhalla Game Studios **ETA:** ?

22 **Recently ending its publishing agreement with THQ but still promising a release in 2013, Itagaki's *Devil's Third* remains a third-person shooter that could cut itself a piece of a very lucrative pie.** As well as relying on the many staples the genre has to offer, Valhalla Game Studios is hoping to inject its action mechanics into the mix in order to stay far more varied than what we're used to. If successful, there's no telling what Itagaki could open up post *Ninja Gaiden*. The real genius will come when the controversial developer decides to unveil more.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Gears Of War, Ninja Gaiden, Dead Or Alive



LITTLE INFERNO

Format: PC, Mac, Wii U **Publisher:** Tomorrow Corporation
Developer: In-house **ETA:** Winter 2012

23 **From the designers of *World Of Goo* and *Henry Hatsworth* comes another perplexing puzzle title, courtesy of new indie outfit Tomorrow Corporation.** Players must use a fireplace to burn, well, everything they can to help thaw a frozen Earth. Expect a sublime mix of ingenious design and wry chuckles to get you through those cold nights.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: World Of Goo, Henry Hatsworth, Stacking



GONE HOME

Format: PC **Publisher:** Fullbright Company **Developer:** In-house **ETA:** Early 2013

24 **Fresh from Fullbright Company, a start-up studio from developers that have worked on the likes of *BioShock* and *XCOM*, is *Gone Home*, an incredibly eerie and atmospheric adventure game.** Pushing story and investigation, which opens up as you play, it looks every bit as uncomfortable as you'd imagine.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: BioShock, Myst, LA Noire



SOUL SACRIFICE

Format: PS Vita **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Marvelous/Sony **ETA:** Spring 2013

25 **It's not easy to follow the likes of *Mega Man, Dead Rising* and *Onimusha*, but former Capcom employee Keiji Inafune is attempting just that with *Soul Sacrifice*.** This dark fantasy game, in which giant monsters rip out entire parts of their bodies, such as gruesome spinal cords, in order to become more powerful, certainly has the ability to grab headlines. Now let's hope it makes good on the promise of its creator's pedigree.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Monster Hunter, Dark Souls, Golden Sun

PROJECT HAPPINESS

Format: TBA **Publisher:** Rising Star **Developer:** ToyBox Inc **ETA:** Early 2013

26 ***Harvest Moon* creator Yasuhiro Wada unveiled this new title at E3 with the critical words, "violence is boring".** As such, this new game will be geared toward making the player feel as positive as possible, with pleasant music (by *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu), idyllic locations and gameplay mechanics built around friendship and collaboration. "*Project Happiness* is not only meant to be a fun game experience, but I also want it to help expand the player's view of the world, and make them ponder what their life means to them," said Wada during the announcement.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Harvest Moon, Recettear, Animal Crossing



DESTINY

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Activision **Developer:** Bungie **ETA:** Late 2013

27 **When the information hits it will hit hard, but for now Bungie is happy to allow *Destiny* to wait.** Promising that it will be a 'game-changer' in the same way *Halo* was – and that's no small feat – the company's pledge that eventually the title will belong more to its audience than the studio itself raises questions as to just exactly what Bungie has planned. A leaked document from its Activision publishing agreement suggests *Destiny* will actually be a four-game-long MMO series that straddles hardware generations.

Anticipation Rating: 9

FOR FANS OF: Halo, Call Of Duty, Marathon



PAPO & YO

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Minority **ETA:** Late 2012

28 ***Papo & Yo* may hint at being nothing more than a quirky puzzler, but the themes and ideas behind it are what set it apart.** From the mind of Vincent Caballero who once worked with EA on *Army Of Two*, the entire concept is based on the developer's own life: a monster who acts as both the antagonist and, on occasion, unwilling helper is based on his father; his mother is represented as a protective robot; while Caballero himself is shown as the child from his own youth he always wanted to be. There's certainly a sense of pretence about the whole thing, but just the inspiration is enough to make it intriguing.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Limbo, Fez, Braid



LOCOCYCLE

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Microsoft
Developer: Twisted Pixel **ETA:** Summer 2013

29 **It's hard to tell exactly what *LocoCycle* is, given the enigmatic announcement trailer unveiled at E3 earlier this year – showcasing a glowing sentient motorcycle and little else.** From the developer behind *The Gunstringer* and *'Splosion Man*, there's little doubt it's another quirky XBLA title, but whether it's a racer or something completely unexpected remains to be seen.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF Trials Evolution, The Gunstringer, 'Splosion Man

DEMON'S SCORE

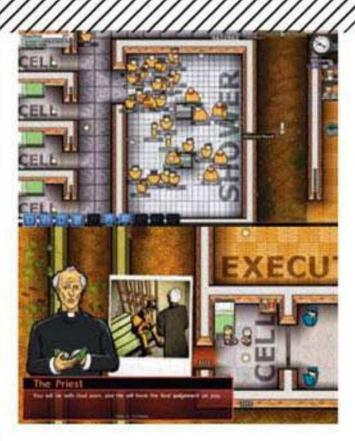
Format: iOS, Android **Publisher:** Square Enix
Developer: INiS **ETA:** Late 2012

33 Square Enix tucked away this announcement among the usual cacophony of E3 earlier this year. A stylish gothic on-rails shooter, it matches lightning-fast shooting with rhythm-action elements. Created by iNiS, the developer behind *Gitaroo Man* and *Ouendan*, it may well be the next big hardcore rhythm-action sensation.

Anticipation Rating: 10

FOR FANS OF: House Of The Dead, Elite Beat Agents, Gitaroo Man





PRISON ARCHITECT

Format: PC **Publisher:** Introversion
Developer: In-house **ETA:** Early 2013

30 **Another day, another life simulator.** Still, Introversion has put a disturbing twist on the standard template, tasking players to build and maintain a prison brimming with unseemly types. Prison beatings, executions and cell spot-checks make for just a couple of chores in your daily managerial routine, as the game presents the raw grit of prison life with a charming cartoony whimsy.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: The Sims, Game Dev Story, Theme Hospital



FORTNITE

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher**: Microsoft
Developer: Epic Games
ETA: Summer 2013

34 **Confirmed by Epic as a PC exclusive, the true influence *Minecraft* has had on *Fortnite* has finally been revealed.** Running through what we'll call three different phases, the first allows you to explore the world, seeing what items you can find. Next, it's time to use those items to build a fort before stage three: surviving in said fort. More next month.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Minecraft, Terraria, Fortress Craft

INSANE

Format: PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
Publisher: THQ **Developer:** Volition
ETA: Late 2013

31 **If anyone else was harping on about taking players to a place they've never seen before we wouldn't listen.** Guillermo del Toro changes all that. The first game from the filmmaker promises to be a survival horror that will reignite the genre and push boundaries. If nothing else, it should be intriguing.

Anticipation Rating: 7

FOR FANS OF: Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Dead Space



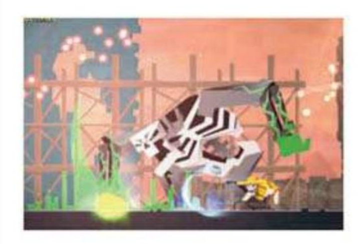
GUACAMELEE!

Format: PS Vita **Publisher:** Sony
Developer: DrinkBox Studios **ETA:** Early 2013

35 **Exclusive to the PS3 and PS Vita, *Guacamelee!*, aside from a ridiculous name, is a traditional platformer with the twist that the world can be shifted as and when you please.** Much like *Shift* on iOS, doing so is imperative to getting through levels and solving puzzles.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Shift, Shadow Complex, 'Splosion Man



OVERSTRIKE

Format: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 **Publisher:** EA
Developer: Insomniac Games **ETA:** ?

32 Announced at E3 2011 and then hidden away from the masses, *Overstrike*, from *Resistance* developer Insomniac, marks the first time the former Sony-leaning studio has made a multiformat game. Given the creativity granted to past projects, this has every chance of providing a very satisfying alternative to the *COD* model.

Anticipation Rating: 6

FOR FANS OF: Call Of Duty, Gears Of War, Resistance

FIREFALL

Format: PC **Publisher:** Webzen
Developer: Red 5 Studios **ETA**: Late 2012

36 **AS THE FREE-TO-PLAY market grows, Red 5 Studios is hoping to capitalise with *Firefall*, a game that dares to combine MMORPG and MMOFPS together.** With that in mind, a large open world will be on offer for co-op campaign players, and a competitive arena for those who enjoy shooting others in the face. A jack of all trades, sure, but one that dares to push what's possible.

Anticipation Rating: 5

FOR FANS OF: Tribes, World Of Warcraft, Borderlands

TOKYO JUNGLE

Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** PlayStation C.A.M.P **ETA:** Early 2013

37 **Some games defy logic and reason.** We're not sure who came up with the idea for the apocalypse to occur with only the animal kingdom surviving but dammit, *Tokyo Jungle* has made that dream a reality. Recently confirmed for a Western release, *Tokyo Jungle* allows you to choose a species before trying to survive in the slums of Japan's capital. As insane as it sounds, it's already achieved plenty of attention both in the East and West, proving that there's every chance it'll find some success when it launches later this year.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Space Station Silicon Valley, Dog's Life, Paradroid





WATCH DOGS

Format: PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Developer: In-house **ETA:** Late 2013

38 **There's nothing about *Watch Dogs* that isn't pushing what we've come to expect in videogames.** Although it's, obviously, early days for Ubisoft's potential franchise, *Watch Dogs* is playing not only with technology from a technical perspective – it looks incredible – but with how it operates in-game too. The fictional central operating system that runs through the environment may not be a million miles away from what we have currently, but the ability to tamper with it is certainly an interesting dynamic where gaming is concerned. Open worlds have always strived to offer a setting where there's no real boundaries facing the player, so one where traffic lights, mobile phones, laptops, streetlights and more random objects can be hacked pushes this idea far further than we're used to.

Far more importantly, and potentially interesting, than this, however, is how Ubisoft is working in the idea of co-op play. The concept that another player may be able to join in with someone else's narrative stream without being directly involved is a unique and innovative one, toying with the realms of the MMO that are still yet to penetrate consoles. If implemented well, *Watch Dogs* could be leading the way for some time.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Assassin's Creed, Grand Theft Auto, BioShock



ASCEND: NEW GODS

Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** Microsoft **Developer:** Signal Studios **ETA:** Early 2013

39 **Aside from continuing to release, or at least house, some truly stunning games, Xbox Live Arcade, as a service, is still an evolving and developing entity.** Where *Ascend: New Gods* is concerned, it's embracing what's next for Microsoft in terms of technology too. As well as relying on many RPG ideas that have been popularised over the years, its dedication and association with Microsoft's Surface tablet is where it will completely stand out. Promising moments that will not only take place on your portable device but also when you're away from your TV, it's an experience that may be unattainable anywhere else.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: Infinity Blade, God Of War, Diablo



THE LAST GUARDIAN

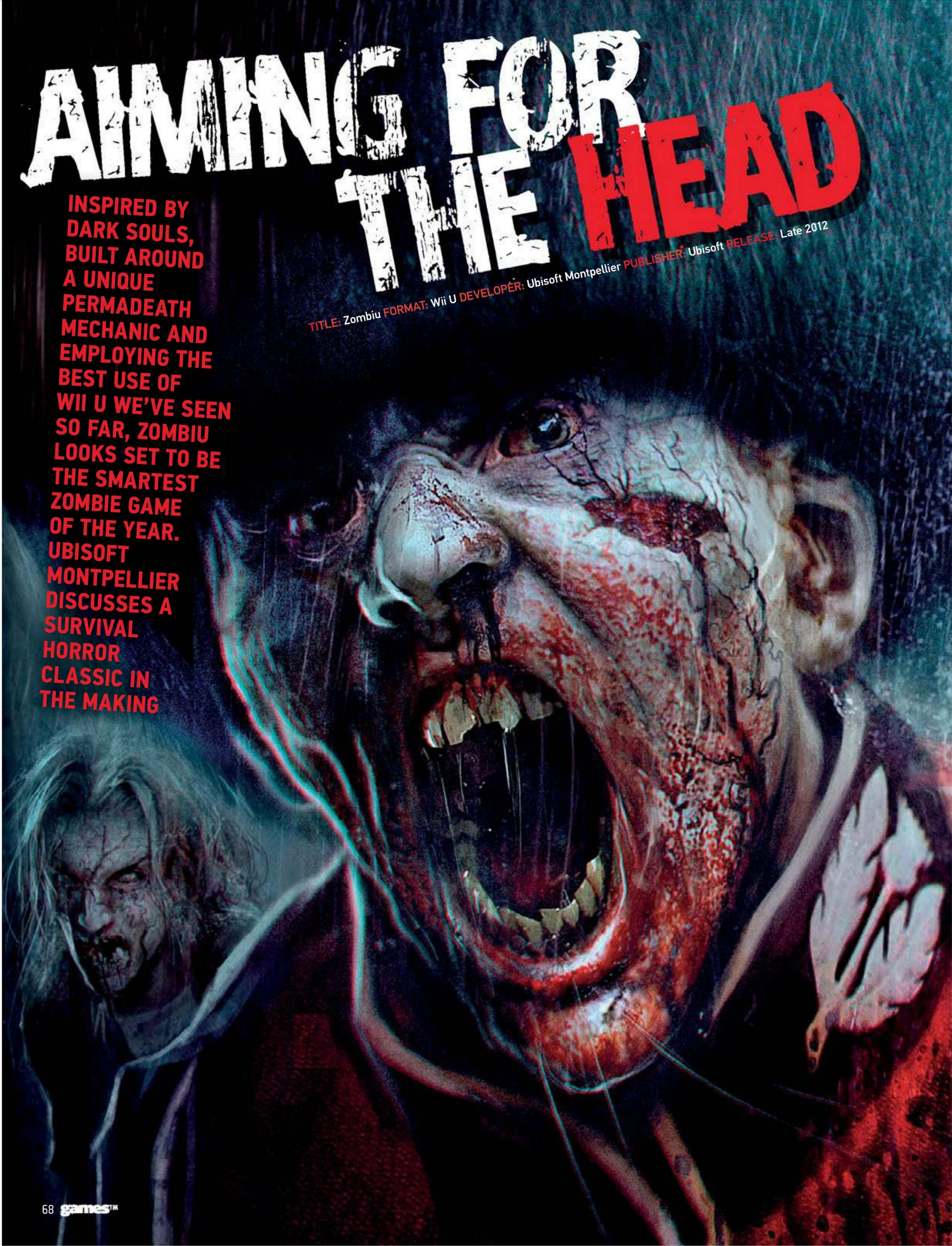
Format: PlayStation 3 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** In-house **ETA:** ?

40 **Amid the worry of whether Team ICO is actually going to release *The Last Guardian* is the potential of what could be.** Few have played *ICO* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* and not been moved to some degree, and the genius behind the third in the 'TrICO' trilogy is the levels the developer is going to in order to achieve this. Always managing to create an emotional attachment from very little, if *The Last Guardian* can overcome its development woes there's no question how powerful and impactful it can be. Even if that dog thing dies at the end...

Now it just needs a release date.

Anticipation Rating: 8

FOR FANS OF: ICO, Shadow Of The Colossus, Majin & The Forsaken Kingdom



AIMING FOR THE HEAD

INSPIRED BY DARK SOULS, BUILT AROUND A UNIQUE PERMADEATH MECHANIC AND EMPLOYING THE BEST USE OF WII U WE'VE SEEN SO FAR, ZOMBIU LOOKS SET TO BE THE SMARTEST ZOMBIE GAME OF THE YEAR. UBISOFT MONTPELLIER DISCUSSES A SURVIVAL HORROR CLASSIC IN THE MAKING

TITLE: Zombiu FORMAT: Wii U DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montpellier PUBLISHER: Ubisoft RELEASE: Late 2012



Who could have seen it coming? Videogame tradition dictates that when Nintendo launches a new console, it's Nintendo that defines the way that system will play, shows other developers what makes it special, whether it be with a new Mario game, *Wii Sports* or *Tetris*. So imagine our surprise when we played the first batch of Wii U launch titles and found that it wasn't Nintendo that impressed us the most, but Ubisoft. *Rayman Legends* is such a good display of the GamePad's potential for co-op gaming that it puts *New Super Mario Bros U* to shame, for example. But it's *Zombiu* that really stands out as Wii U's best chance to show off its unique potential to the hardcore audience Nintendo needs to impress.

"The best games are the ones that are designed from the ground up, specifically for the hardware on which they're going to run," says *Zombiu* design director Gabrielle Shrager. And she's not just saying that. *Zombiu* makes such great use of the Wii U GamePad that both its subject matter and gameplay feel perfectly suited to each other. Scanning the environment of the post-apocalyptic FPS world with the GamePad screen, for example, while it might sound like a gimmick, feels great in practice. Moving the GamePad around in 360 degrees enables players to see their virtual surroundings all around them, even behind themselves if they wish, and lends a level of immersion unparalleled by any other competing technology, whether it be 3D, Kinect or anything else. It's as close to the virtual reality promise of the Nineties we've yet come and is one step closer to one of those great videogame goals – to feel like you're actually there.

This level of immersion in the game world is exactly what makes *Zombiu* so special. While some gamers fear that the second screen of the GamePad will distance them from the world inside the TV set, it actually achieves the opposite, drawing them further in and offering new ways to interact with it. Happen upon a stash of loot, for example, and its contents will be displayed on the GamePad, forcing you to look down while rummaging through to decide what to take and what to leave. The beauty of this? The game itself doesn't pause while you manage your resources, so chances are that when you look back up at the screen a zombie will have stumbled toward you out of nowhere and will pounce right at your distracted face.

It's a small feature that makes a huge difference, finally after so many years bringing fresh, interactive ways to scare gamers within the survival horror genre. And those players really should be afraid, because in *Zombi U*, death is permanent. Die and you'll respawn as a new character, losing all your previous skills and equipment and essentially starting again, much as in a *Rogue*-style game such as *Shiren The Wanderer* or recent XBLA success story *Spelunky*. Yet there's a rather genius twist. Your previous character will respawn in the game environment as a zombie and you'll have the option to find and kill your old self, winning back your old loot in the process.

"It's not a question of if you're going to live, it's how long," says Shrager. "And the longer your character survives for, the more skills they acquire." When they inevitably bite the dust, the loss of skills should

■ "The GamePad offered us the opportunity to develop creative controls that greatly increase the player's sensations of trying to survive a zombie apocalypse: the pad is transformed into the ultimate survival kit," says Shrager.

hurt in proportion to the amount of time invested in them, hopes the development team. "From an emotional point of view," says Shrager, "when you die and respawn you'll have to go back and kill yourself. Maybe one of your characters that lasted three minutes you won't feel as bad about as one that lasts 45, that's for sure."

It's at this point that *Zombiu* producer Guillaume Brunier jumps in with another great twist to the permadeath mechanic. "There's also a gameplay aspect to this because if you survive for 45 minutes or one hour or two hours and you die, the zombie will be that much stronger," he reveals. "So when a one-hour-plus character dies and becomes a zombie it will be much tougher to get your gear back from them. You won't want to die because you won't want to lose your skills, but you also won't want to fight yourself when you're that powerful."



Or, looking at it another way, your deceased characters can potentially become boss monsters, we suggest. "They're more like evolved zombies. More enraged, faster, more erratic," counters Shrager. "Often we think of bosses in terms of being bigger, bulkier and looking completely different. But what's interesting in this game is that these are humans who have turned into zombies. They're not going to grow six feet, because where would the credibility be? And it's scarier because all of a sudden you'll see a zombie you think you can handle but then they'll unexpectedly start climbing the ramparts on the Tower of London. Which should shock and surprise you."

"We have different evolutions of our basic zombie throughout the game," Brunier adds. "At the beginning, for example, they cannot jump or take off or go under a table or climb ladders. So the more your character survives, the more of these abilities we can give to your zombie once you're dead."

None of this sounds particularly easy. In fact, **games™**'s hands-on time with the E3 demo proves exactly that. On at least two occasions we're caught unaware and killed off during our exploration of a creepy abandoned nursery. We soon learn that if a zombie gets close enough to touch you there's an extremely small chance you'll walk away alive. It's only a few minutes before we begin to play the game completely differently to the average FPS, maintaining a 20-yard stare, watching for anything shuffling in the shadows and making sure to conserve ammo – not just because it's in short supply but also because the sound of gunfire seems to attract unwanted attention from the undead.



■ There are a few reasons why London was chosen as the setting for *ZombiU* but one of the main advantages is that it has more CCTV cameras than virtually any city in the world. Handy for *ZombiU*'s CCTV monitoring gameplay. (See caption to the right)

"What we want for sure is that if players decide not to play at the pace we want them to play, we will potentially kill them," threatens Brunier. "If they start running around and wasting bullets then we'll have no pity for them and they will die. That is a direction we've given to the team. Another objective we've given them is that the Gamescom demo must be harder than the E3 demo." Cripes.

If Nintendo really is trying to aim Wii U at the hardcore then it's unlikely to shoot closer to the bullseye than with this, a game that takes inspiration from the most hardcore of videogames. "A bunch of the core designers on the team are huge fans of *Dark Souls*," reveals Shrager. "I've played all the way through and even through New Game+ on both *Dark Souls* and *Demon's Souls* so they're a huge inspiration. If we hit that same sensation of terror as you're rounding a corner and wondering if you're prepared enough for what faces you then we'll have hit one of our targets."

The *Dark Souls* comparisons don't end with the difficulty. Brunier tells us that players will be able to explore the entire world without the interruption of loading times, for example, while certain similarities exist in the online mechanics. Though the multiplayer is split-screen only, Brunier promises that the story mode is "full of online play."

"Players can spray-paint secret messages all over the city of London to help or sometimes hinder their friends," says Shrager. "The blacklight feature on the survivor's pad will allow players to scan environments to reveal these messages." "And we've got your friends' zombies invading your maps," adds Brunier. "If we are friends on Wii U and you die on a certain map then when I venture into the same map I will see your zombie and will be able to kill him and take his backpack." Curiously, the team tells us that although all of these features sound a lot like those promised in Wii U's integrated online service Miiverse, they are in fact specific *Zombiu* features. Though Shrager adds that basic Miiverse functionality such as in-game screenshot sharing will be supported.

After a few hours spent playing *Zombiu* and talking to its development team, it's clear to us that few studios have embraced Wii U as much as Ubisoft. The team's first encounter with Wii U was "very frustrating" according to Shrager. "Only a few of us could actually check out the early kits as everything was extremely confidential," she says. But it wasn't long before the hardware had got the team's imaginations spinning.

"When Nintendo spoke to us about their new machine, we understood that this time they did not want to limit their audience to casual gamers, but also propose core gaming experiences, and we plunged headlong in this direction," explains Shrager. At first, the team explored the idea of creating a more traditional game in the form of *Killer Freaks From Outer Space*, an FPS announced in 2011 and since forgotten, but the project soon evolved into something more interesting as the team experimented with the hardware.



■ The GamePad is perfect for creating tense moments – like struggling to find a door combination with zombies on your tail.

"IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF IF YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE, IT'S HOW LONG"

■ On the use of in-game CCTVcameras, Shrager says: "The more eyes you have on London the more you can prepare, and you may even decide to revisit a location you've already been to because you've spotted something you need there."

■ "We don't have the budget for cut-scenes," jokes Brunier, before Shrager adds "the story designer's take is that we prefer visual storytelling, the stories that players invent for themselves."



U ASK THE QUESTIONS

DURING OUR INTERVIEW WITH THE ZOMBIU TEAM, WE POSED SELECT QUESTIONS OFFERED BY GAMES™ READERS. HERE ARE THE ANSWERS...

The game looks amazing, but can you tell me if it will be free-roaming or linear?

Angus439, gamestm.co.uk

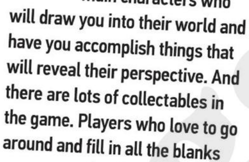
Guillaume Brunier: We've got a story to follow. So in that sense there is some linearity; however, because of our permadeath mechanic, you don't feel that the game is linear. Let's say you played the E3 demo and reach the end of the nursery map. You've reached your objective and got the keycard in your backpack, you just need to get out of there and get back to your safehouse. But now you die and restart with a different character. But you don't have to do the same stuff over again – you just have to go back to that place, find your former self, retrieve the keycard from him and get the hell out of there. You do not redo the mission. You just complete the mission with another survivor. Also, when you are in your safehouse, you've got a control panel that you can use to check out the CCTV cameras around London. You can hack the cameras and use them to look at everything that's happening on the maps – see where food is, or lots zombies, or weapons – so you can decide where to go.

So far the only information has been around the use of the GamePad. What can you tell us about the story and characters?

Joel Hartman, Facebook

Gabrielle Shrager: The concept of permadeath means that in our game the main characters are not the players. There are three characters that, from a gameplay perspective, are mission givers but they will have a very different point of view of what's going on in the world and through this zombie apocalypse. In zombie fiction you always get one guy who thinks someone is punishing the world and another that thinks the government is responsible for releasing a virus... So you always have characters who will give you a different point of view on why they think the zombies are there. So we do have main characters who will draw you into their world and have you accomplish things that will reveal their perspective. And there are lots of collectables in the game. Players who love to go around and fill in all the blanks and understand all the motivations will be able to do that. Those who do not like to pick up collectables will still be able to understand the story without getting them; it adds a new layer.

Gabrielle Shrager, design director





Guillaume Brunier, producer

When you develop for Wii U is it mandatory to always make use of the GamePad?

DifferentClass, games™ forum

Brunier: Nintendo does not require anything from us. However, we believe that it wouldn't make sense to develop for a system without taking advantage of its hardware.

Shrager: Obviously you can port existing games across to Wii U and not use the GamePad, but it's much more fun to create something that's designed perfectly for the technology.

DAYS OF THE DEAD

ZOMBIU IS THE CULMINATION OF LOTS OF DIFFERENT INFLUENCES

JOHN DEE

An advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, John Dee was an astrologer with an unusual interest in the occult. His prophecies concerning the end of the world are a core inspiration on the events of *ZombiU*.



ZOMBI

Ubisoft's first game, a 1986 survival horror for Amstrad CPC, shares a number of similarities to *ZombiU*, though the team says the shared name is only "a wink and a smile at that first title."



RESIDENT EVIL 2

Surprise works best in contrast with a dead quiet calm," says Gabrielle Shrager on the tone of *ZombiU*. "I remember when I played *Resident Evil 2* with the lights out way past midnight and was scared to hell by the crows crashing through the window."



DEAD SPACE EXTRACTION

ZombiU is being written by Antony Johnston, writer of *Dead Space* and *Dead Space Extraction*. The latter is one of the best uses of motion control in a horror game, incidentally.



DEMON'S SOULS

"At one point in *Demon's Souls* I broke and had to read the wiki," admits Shrager. "We're testing now to figure out how much support we need. Instead of being in a 'push' mode we want to be in 'pull' mode."



"IF PLAYERS DECIDE NOT TO PLAY AT THE PACE WE WANT, WE WILL POTENTIALLY KILL THEM"

■ Sniping mechanics are done to death in games, but they take on a new life with the benefit of 'second screen' gaming.

"We started off last year with some very different types of enemies, these crazy aliens, and we came up with our asynchronous multiplayer mode, which we really like because of the way it uses the GamePad," recalls Brunier. "But we still weren't using the pad enough, so we tried to come up with more cool ideas, and very quickly the idea came for the player in the story mode to have to constantly look from the TV screen to the GamePad. But when we started to test this concept in *Killer Freaks* it just didn't work at all. The enemies were too fast and that didn't give the player the chance to play properly. It was really confusing. So we took a step back and started to design gameplay where the enemy was slow. Aiming with the GamePad like it's a sniper rifle, that takes some time. Resource management features, they take time too. So we quickly came to the conclusion that we should slow down the pace of the game, and zombies just felt natural."



Once we honed in on the potential of the GamePad for survival horror, we focused mainly on the features that worked best for our own vision of the genre," adds Shrager. "Some features do work better than others, but here's an example of one idea we had that just didn't cut it despite the promise...

"At one point we mounted the GamePad on the Wii Zapper to be able to use the gyroscope on the GamePad to look all around us and reveal the game environment and enemies on the pad screen. It was really fun, until we realised that everyone wanted to actually run around their living rooms to navigate the world, chase or run away from enemies, and using a stick to move just felt wrong. What we learned, or at least confirmed, is that a game designed specifically for the potential of new tech is both more enriching for the new possibilities and more rewarding for players seeking new gaming experiences. By concentrating on the GamePad as a 'survival kit', I think we avoided useless gimmicks."

Gimmick-free is a slogan that should be plastered straight across the *Zombiu* packaging. It's a lesson many third-party Nintendo developers are still to learn, even after a generation of work on both Wii and DS, but *Zombiu* cracks it, making great use of the Wii U's unique functions to enhance the survival horror genre without, at least in our experience to date, distracting from it.

What's more, the team is confident that the game will get even better between now and launch, particularly in its already impressive visuals. "As with any other platform launch, we're learning to develop on Wii U at the same time as we're making the game," says Shrager. "So obviously we're not able to use its true power and architecture yet. There's surely a smarter way to use Wii U's large active memory, for example. I guess we'll see games benefiting from this in the second or third generation of games. As far as *Zombiu* is concerned, we think we can push visuals further than what was shown at E3. How far? We're working on that..."

Such ambition, coupled with an impressive E3 demo has enabled *Zombiu* to stand out from the crowd as one of, if not the, best games on Wii U. But we'd go further than that and say that *Zombiu* is easily one of our most anticipated games of 2012, and we know we're not alone in thinking that. As such, the pressure is on for Ubisoft Montpellier to satisfy that expectation. But Shrager doesn't seem fazed. "Of course we feel the pressure," she grins. "But with the pressure comes the knowledge that something about our game hit home, and that's just the kind of motivation we pray for as developers."



■ While some of the uses of the GamePad are a little obvious, the way they tear your eyes away from the danger of the TV screen action makes them worthwhile.

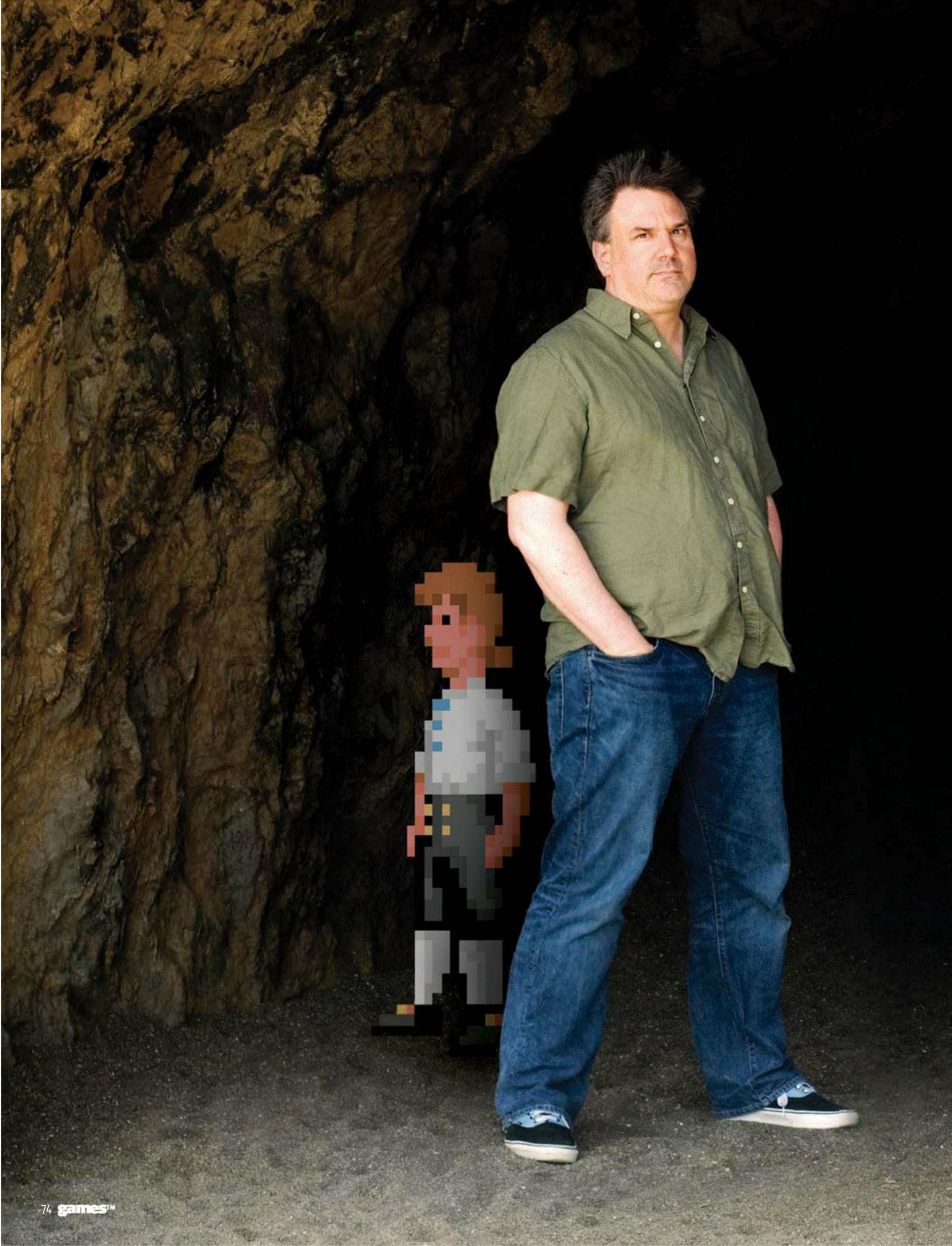
■ The GamePad makes it easy to pick your weapon of choice. You just have to take your eyes off the zombies to do it.

ZOMBI U AND ME — WHY ZOMBIU'S MULTIPLAYER WON'T BE GOING ONLINE

■ Given that Wii U is supposed to represent Nintendo's biggest push into the realm of online gaming, it's strange that many of its launch titles do not feature online multiplayer. *Pikmin 3* is the most high-profile casualty in the online war, but it seems that *Zombiu* may be next.

"That's correct," confirms Brunier. "We don't have any online modes for the multiplayer. Of course, we would like to do online modes but that's something we have on our list for *Zombiu 2*. However, the core idea is 'living room fun'. Nintendo is a master in doing this; people on Wii, GameCube and N64, that's what Nintendo is all about, having fun with your buddies on the couch. So that's very important to us. We drew up the design thinking about this first. Then, because of time constraints and technical issues, we decided not to go for the online component in multiplayer. But I really think that being in the same room is fun. When you play multiplayer in the same room there's always that temptation to lean over and peek at what the other player is doing, and we've actually incorporated that into the game design, which will be a lot of fun."

So what is the multiplayer? "*Zombiu* features a one-on-one competitive multiplayer mode that tasks one player with controlling zombie hordes using the Wii U GamePad, while the other player fights to survive in FPS view with a classic controller in an assault mode we call Survivors Versus Zombies," explains Shrager. It sounds different at least, and is another fine example of how the GamePad potentially changes multiplayer gaming. "We went through the same thing last year with *Rayman Origins* where people would ask where the online multiplayer was," adds Shrager. "But once they got it in their hands I think we respawned this idea that playing together in the same room can be so much fun. And that's something Nintendo has brought back too."





Ron Gilbert Emerges

25 years ago, Ron Gilbert designed the first point-and-click adventure game. Now he's returning to his roots with The Cave, but much has changed in the meantime

Shortly after stepping down as Hothead Games' creative director in 2010, Ron Gilbert was visited by a ghost from his past – the ghost of a game he'd never made. For nearly three decades, Gilbert had been bandying around the idea of a game set in a rather peculiar cave. He explains, "Caves are spooky and they're weird, and we've probably been using them as our homes for the last hundred thousand years. They're these things that speak to us as human beings on some level. But then taking it one step further, it's not just a cave, but there's this weird kind of [sentience] to the cave." The inspiration predated *Monkey Island* and *Maniac Mansion*, his most famous games, and even his employment at LucasArts (then known as Lucasfilm Games). "Nobody was paying me to design games back then. This was an idea that I was playing around with in my spare time. It was this game about these three characters that go into this weird, metaphysical cave and solve puzzles. They weren't really adventure game puzzles, because my head wasn't in the adventure game design space back then, so it was a lot more kind of weird, offbeat puzzles that these three characters solved together, working together, to keep going down and down..."

The game's design never got very far, but every few years the persistent idea resurfaced: "I'd think about it for ten minutes, and then I'd move on. And then, a couple of years ago, it sort of popped into my head again, and I was thinking about it, and I told Tim [Schafer, head of Double Fine Productions] about it. And he said, 'That's a really cool idea, why don't you come here and let Double Fine make that game?' I spent about a month after that, just committing all my ideas to paper, and then I looked at it and thought, 'Okay, I have enough here that I think this actually can be something.' " Gilbert adds, without hesitation, "At that point I knew it was going to be an adventure game."

It's an important distinction, since by then a good many years had elapsed since Ron Gilbert's last proper adventure game. In 1987, he co-designed *Maniac Mansion*, the first adventure where players used the mouse to combine verbs with on-screen hotspots instead of typing commands into a parser. A programmer by trade, Gilbert also created the SCUMM engine, a toolset LucasArts went on to use for most of its point-and-click classics. He worked on several other adventures (most notably, as lead designer on the first two *Monkey Island* instalments) before leaving LucasArts to found Humongous Entertainment in 1992. There, he focused mostly on kids' games throughout the Nineties – simplified "junior adventures" like *Putt-Putt*

INSIDE THE CAVE

■ "BACK WHEN WE were doing games like *Maniac* or *Monkey*, there was this concept in the design of rewarding players by showing them new art. When they solved a puzzle, they got to see a new room they hadn't seen before. That was a reward for a lot of players, and we really used that," Gilbert says. "That was a driving thing in *The Cave*, to use that reveal, and when people are moving through the world, we subtly change everything and now you feel like you're in this whole different area. And it's neat. It's bizarre. It's strange."

"I did want to slice away some of the fat that I think has accumulated on adventure games over the years"

and *Pajama Sam*. Then shifting marketplace conditions changed everything. By the dawn of the new millennium, an ill-timed corporate buyout had put Humongous Entertainment out of business, adventure games were "dead" and Ron Gilbert was burned out.

Years passed. Gilbert pitched a new game idea to publishers – a funny, story-heavy, episodic RPG with adventure game elements. Publishers didn't want it. "The weird thing is the more publishers that turned it down, the more convinced I became that this was a great idea. Every rejection fuelled me with excitement and the knowledge that I was right," he wrote on his Grumpy Gamer blog in 2008. He eventually signed with independent developer Hothead to make *DeathSpank*, optimistic that the adventure-like project he'd long championed would finally come to be. But the result wasn't what he'd hoped for. "When *DeathSpank* was [planned as] an episodic game, it was more of an adventure game and a light RPG where you fought monsters while going from puzzle to puzzle," he explains. But when plans to structure the game episodically were scrapped, many of its intended adventure elements fell away: "I felt it needed to be more of an RPG to support the weight of the new length of the game. In the end I was never fully happy with how *DeathSpank* turned out." He left Hothead shortly before it shipped.

And then that old ghost paid him a visit.

"Tim and I were just shooting the shit about stuff, I don't know why I brought it up. It was just something I brought up," Gilbert says of pitching his idea to his friend and former LucasArts collaborator. In September of 2010, he coyly revealed on his blog that he was working at Double Fine on a new project. Now, after nearly two years of covert development, the secret is finally out: *The Cave*, a new Ron Gilbert adventure, will come to Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network and PC in early 2013, courtesy of Sega.

"A LOT OF publishers, if you want to do an adventure-type game, you need to never mention the A-word," Gilbert says. "You need to come in and really pitch it as something else, even though it is an adventure game. At some level, I was just tired of doing that. I was like, I want to make an adventure game, I'm going to pitch an adventure game. So when I was pitching this around, I was very blunt about it: 'This is an adventure game. These are some of the things that I don't like about adventure games, that I want to fix, but it really is an adventure game.' And to Sega's credit, they really did embrace that."

The Cave's reveal comes mere months after Tim Schafer famously appealed to fans on Kickstarter, maintaining that publishers won't take a chance on adventure games. How does this relate to Gilbert's own experience? "I think that if you wanted to make a very classic, point-and-click adventure game, you would have a hard time with a publisher. So what Tim was talking about in the pitch video, I think is very true," he admits. "But with *The Cave*, what I was setting out to do there was to not make a traditional point-and-click 2D adventure game. At its core it is an adventure game, but I did want to slice away some of the fat that I think has accumulated on adventure games over the years. So I think that was one of the things that appealed to Sega."

It might not look anything like the SCUMM games he's known for – especially not in the trailer released just before E3, in which *The Cave* seems very much like a side-scrolling platformer – but Gilbert maintains this new game is every bit an adventure as *Maniac Mansion* or *Monkey Island*. Better yet, many of the genre's annoying elements are gone. "One of the main design goals was to get rid of some of the monotony of adventure games. I think one of the reasons that people have called it a platformer is just that they see these characters running. God forbid a character run in an adventure game, right?" he laughs. "Or, 'Oh my God, this character's jumping, that can't be an adventure game.' But I think one of the things that adventure games are really criticised for is just walking from one area to another. Walking from Meathook's house down to the town of Mêlée [in *The Secret of Monkey Island*] is monotonous at some level, because it takes a long time. So one of the goals for *The Cave* was to really make that traversal fun, so that when you are walking from one area to another, going somewhere to pick up something you forgot or doubling back to solve a puzzle, that the act of walking from one place to another is actually a fun thing for you to do."

THAT THE CAVE presents itself as a platformer isn't all that unexpected considering the strong influence an actual platformer, Playdead's *Limbo*, had on its design. "I did really admire how they simplified

INSIDE THE CAVE ■ "YOU'RE NEVER GOING to miss a jump in [*The Cave*], unless you're a complete moron," Gilbert says of the controls. "It's not a platformer where you have to make sure you double-jump it just in time to grab the ledge, or if you don't hit the right combo button you're not doing something, it's not like that. Yeah, you do have to jump some gaps. Yes, you do have to jump up to grab some ledges, but you're just not going to miss these things unless you're trying."

INSIDE THE CAVE ■ "I WAS NEVER interested in adventure games, in being stuck on puzzles.… It's not going to be a mind-numbingly hard game," Gilbert says about *The Cave*. "The game is really just an experience that you have. There are puzzles, some of them are hard puzzles and you may bang your head against them for a while, but I really wanted it to be something that you could just kind of wrap yourself in, and move yourself down this cave and experience the narrative and everything that's going on."





INSIDE THE CAVE ■ "THE BASIC STORY is that these characters are kind of drawn to this cave," Gilbert says of his latest endeavour. "They don't really know why they found their way there, why they're drawn there, and I guess it's a little bit *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* – where all those people were drawn to Devil's Tower but they really don't know why. And so, these seven characters are kind of drawn to this weird cave, and then they go in exploring. And they're all looking for something. They're all searching for something and they think they can find it, somehow, in the cave."



The Legends Of LucasArts

What happened to the other masters of adventure gaming?

STEVE PURCELL

An artist at Lucasfilm, Purcell is responsible for so many great adventure moments, it's impossible to count. He's best known, however, for the stunning *Monkey Island* box art and as the creator of the Sam & Max characters. He collaborated with Telltale on all three modern *Sam & Max* seasons but has spent most of the past decade at Pixar where he worked up from concept artist to become co-writer and co-director of this year's *Brave*.





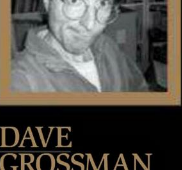
DAVID FOX

One of the earliest designers at Lucasfilm, Fox worked on *Maniac Mansion, Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* and *Zak McKraken* in various capacities. Fox spent his last two years at Lucasfilm developing a location-based videogame/simulator for theme parks and other attractions, but the ambitious project was eventually scrapped. Fox soon left Lucasfilm and has since worked on other simulators as well as designing websites for various companies. He now creates educational software with his wife Annie.



BILL TILLER

A latecomer to LucasArts, Bill Tiller was an artist on *The Dig* and *Full Throttle* and is best known for the cartoon stylings of *The Curse Of Monkey Island*. In 2002 he formed his own adventure studio, Autumn Moon Entertainment, where he created *A Vampyre Story* and *Ghost Pirates Of Vooju Island*. He is currently crowd-funding a *Vampyre Story* episodic series for iPad. Bill also serves as art director for casual game developer Munkey Fun.



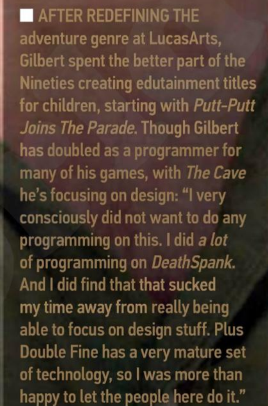
DAVE GROSSMAN

After working on the first two *Monkey Island* games and *Day Of The Tentacle*, Grossman left LucasArts and collaborated with Ron Gilbert's Humongous Games on a series of adventures aimed at children. In 2005 he co-founded Telltale Games and remains there, having overseen all of the company's games to date.



TIM SCHAFER

After completing *Grim Fandango*, Schafer worked on an unreleased PS2 game before leaving LucasArts to form his own company, Double Fine. The developer struggled for around a decade, producing only two games to middling success, before reinventing itself as a creator of small but imaginative download games.



■ AFTER REDEFINING THE adventure genre at LucasArts, Gilbert spent the better part of the Nineties creating edutainment titles for children, starting with *Putt-Putt Joins The Parade*. Though Gilbert has doubled as a programmer for many of his games, with *The Cave* he's focusing on design: "I very consciously did not want to do any programming on this. I did *a lot* of programming on *DeathSpank*. And I did find that that sucked my time away from really being able to focus on design stuff. Plus Double Fine has a very mature set of technology, so I was more than happy to let the people here do it."

things. It was kind of surprising how fun and entertaining that game was, despite the fact that it had been simplified so much," Gilbert says. "So that was a major influence in me looking at a traditional adventure game design and going, 'How can this be streamlined? How can we cut away all the gristle on this and really just have it be the core of what was fun about adventure games?' " But when it comes to gameplay, he believes the two games have little in common: "Something like *Limbo* had a lot of adventure game aspects to it, but you were essentially solving these very physics-based puzzles, which I don't consider adventure game puzzles. *Limbo* was a brilliant game, but I don't think it's an adventure game. To me, *The Cave* really is an adventure game. You don't have physics-based puzzles. It is about objects, it's about running up against puzzles and finding objects to solve those puzzles. So I think it is very traditional in that sense."

ALTHOUGH HIS FORMER *Monkey Island* co-writer Tim Schafer isn't technically working on *The Cave* (he's busy, of course, with the crowd-funded *Double Fine Adventure*), their offices are right next door to each other and Gilbert says they speak regularly about their ongoing projects: "Tim and I meet for an hour every week and discuss general stuff about what he's working on or what I'm working on. So I'm bouncing stuff off of him." Tim Schafer and Ron Gilbert, both designing adventure games under the same roof? Just five years ago, with Double Fine in the midst of *Brütal Legend*'s gruelling development and Gilbert struggling to find a publisher for *DeathSpank*, such an arrangement would have seemed impossible. What's changed in the industry to make this happen?

"One of the things that's helped adventure games over the years is that a lot more people game today. It's socially acceptable to game, right? If you're an adult and you say you play games, you don't have to say it under your breath or mumble it, you can just come out and say it: 'I play games.' I take the train home and a quarter of the people on the train are gaming the entire time, and they're all adults," Gilbert observes. "So



■ Gilbert's take on LucasArts' *Monkey Island* revamps? "I was glad they allowed players to flip and forth between the original versions and the new ones. I thought that, and that they didn't change the game, showed a lot of respect for the original and the original team. I wasn't thrilled with the new art style… but a lot of people like it. Overall I am pleased with them."

A potted history of

1976: *Colossal Cave Adventure* is developed by Will Crowther as a text-based exploration game. A year later, Don Woods adds Tolkien-esque elements and this version of the game catches the eye of a generation of budding game designers.

1980: *Colossal Cave* inspires an entire decade of text adventures for home systems, but it's Infocom's *Zork* that makes the biggest splash in the early days, selling thousands of copies and making adventure games a household name.



1980: Inspired by *Colossal Cave*, Ken and Roberta Williams found the company that will eventually become Sierra and produce *Mystery House*, the first adventure game to use graphics. Its interface is still text-based, however.



1983: Meanwhile in Japan, Yuji Horii hasn't quite got around to creating *Dragon Quest* yet but he does develop *The Portopia Serial Murder Case*, the first significant adventure in Japan. It kick-starts a lineage of its own that goes mostly unnoticed in the West.



1984: Sierra's success leads to *King's Quest*, a true graphic adventure that allows the player to immerse themselves in a multi-screen game world. The adventure genre as we now know it is born.

1987: Lucasfilm programmer Ron Gilbert creates SCUMM, a utility that can be used to easily script any adventure game you can imagine.



The first game to be made with it is *Maniac Mansion*, which innovates with its multiple characters and defines the Lucasfilm style with memorable humour and a 'point-and-click' interface that does away with text commands.



1987: The same year as *Maniac Mansion*, Sierra and Al Lowe create *Leisure Suit Larry*, a sex comedy that taps into an audience across several generations. Alongside Lucasfilm, Al Lowe hits upon an important point. Adventure games and humour are made for each other.



1988: *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima tries his hand at adventure gaming and knocks it out of the park first time. *Snatcher*, a cyberpunk adventure with elements of *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, draws on Koijma's penchant for encyclopaedic writing and chatty characters to create a very engrossing game world.



1989: Now over a decade old, it's time for the adventure game to evolve, and Sierra gets there first. *Quest For Glory* takes the adventure style of *King's Quest* and blends it with the RPG genre. It's a natural fit, and one that has since blended so seamlessly that you might not have even noticed. Cough – *Mass Effect* – cough.



1990: Adventure masters Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman create *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. Its major innovation is the removal of death as a game mechanic, but it's the sheer quality of the writing, the art and the game design that makes *Monkey Island* the definitive adventure game.



1992: If *Monkey Island* is the definitive adventure then *Monkey Island 2* is the best. Everything about it is better, including one of the greatest endings to any game story. It also innovates in an unexpected area – its music. Lucasfilm's iMUSE system is used to dynamically segue between musical themes in line with the player's actions. It's so complicated that LucasArts couldn't even replicate it in the 2010 remake.



1992: Early Lucasfilm adventure *Loom* was already innovative enough when its initial release used musical elements and sound effects as puzzles, but its 1992 CD-ROM rerelease was even better thanks to its full voiceover, making it the first adventure 'talkie'. Which we now take for granted, of course.



1993: The CD-ROM boom of the early Nineties culminates with *Myst*. Unlike any adventure before

adventure game innovation

it, dialogue and character take a back seat as *Myst*'s first-person perspective and simple puzzles put its high-quality imagery at the forefront. Its gameplay splits opinion among gamers, but the stunning visuals make it a hit with the Windows 95 crowd and it sells bucketloads as a result. This trend has an impact on the whole of gaming, not just adventures.



1993: *Maniac Mansion* was insanely innovative with its multiple character choices and its sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle*, went one better, placing three characters in different time periods and forcing players to think how the passage of time could be used to solve its devious puzzles. Nearly two decades later, *Day Of The Tentacle* remains a masterpiece of game design.



1995: As the first-person shooter begins to take hold of the PC market, adventure developers struggle to keep their games relevant. Adventures like the second *Gabriel Knight* game experiment with the CD-ROM format to bring live-action FMV to the genre, but it only does so much to withhold the inevitable.



1997: LucasArts tries a different tactic to Sierra, forgoing FMV in favour of ridiculously high-quality cartoon visuals in *The Curse Of Monkey Island*. Even with all of the original team off the project, this third *Monkey Island* game proves to be yet another mark of excellence for LucasArts.



1998: This year, LucasArts finally gives up the ghost on SCUMM and replaces it with GRIME, a full 3D engine that sees its debut with Tim Schafer's *Grim Fandango*, one of the finest examples of storytelling in gaming. GRIME does little to reverse the fortunes of adventure gaming, however. LucasArts produces one more GRIME game before giving up on the genre forever.



2001: The next few years are very quiet for the adventure genre but, over in Japan, Capcom mounts its own resurgence with *Gyakuten Saiban*, a graphical text adventure about a madcap defence lawyer. The GBA game is huge in Japan, spawning two sequels, but explodes in popularity when it's translated into the West, on DS, as *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* in 2005.



2005: Out of nowhere, the adventure genre comes back to life in a new and heavily evolved form. French studio Quantic Dream develops *Fahrenheit*, a totally immersive adventure game that throws out clunky old ideas and replaces them with cinematic presentation and split-second decisions that have a huge impact on the story.

2005: Japanese adventures become even more relevant in 2005 as *Phoenix Wright* is converted to DS and a host of other touch-screen adventures follow, making Nintendo's handheld a



great new home for the genre. Cing's *Another Code* takes the format to its heart, utilising the DS's unique functions in such imaginative ways that it shows the adventure still has the potential to evolve.



2006: Telltale Games, a studio of ex-LucasArts employees formed in 2005, reinvents *Sam & Max* as an episodic adventure game series that breaks down the genre into a digestible, serialised format. Six years later, there's still no one doing episodic gaming, or Lucas-style adventures, better than Telltale.



2007: A phenomenon in its own right, *Professor Layton* explodes onto DS, marrying high-quality anime storytelling with isolated puzzle-book-style puzzles to create a whole new type of point-and-click adventure. The resulting series proves to be one of the biggest sellers of its generation and even spawns its own movie. A crossover game with *Phoenix Wright* is expected in 2013.



2007: Capcom takes on the adventure genre yet again, this time on Wii. *Zack & Wiki* makes the puzzles the focus and transplants them into bespoke movements of the Wii Remote. A fantastic sense of humour and almost Rube Goldberg-style interactivity make this one of the best games on Wii.



2009 British firm Revolution Software is well liked for its mid-Nineties SCUMM-style adventures, but was never truly innovative until it hit upon the idea of rereleasing *Beneath A Steel Sky* on the iPhone, identifying Apple's format as the perfect home for adventure games. Three years later, you can't move for adventure games on the App Store.



2010 Quantic Dream follows up *Fahrenheit* with *Heavy Rain*, an even more ambitious work of interactive fiction that is much more successful in its execution. Its masterstroke is that the story keeps going no matter what your actions, reacting to your decisions and even continuing should one or more of your characters die.



2010: Shu Takumi, creator of *Phoenix Wright*, proves he's no one-trick pony with *Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective*. It takes Takumi's penchant for memorable characters and witty dialogue but wraps them in a new type of puzzle game all about restricted possession of objects and the causality of chain reactions. We'd go as far as to say it's actually better than *Phoenix Wright*.

2011: Rockstar Games might not admit to it, but its open-world detective sim *LA Noire* is very much a modern adventure game. Crime scene investigation and



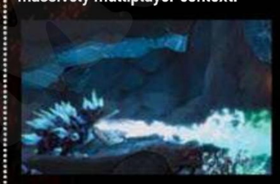
witness cross-examination make it *Phoenix Wright* for the *GTA* crowd, though a few game design boo-boos ultimately let it down.



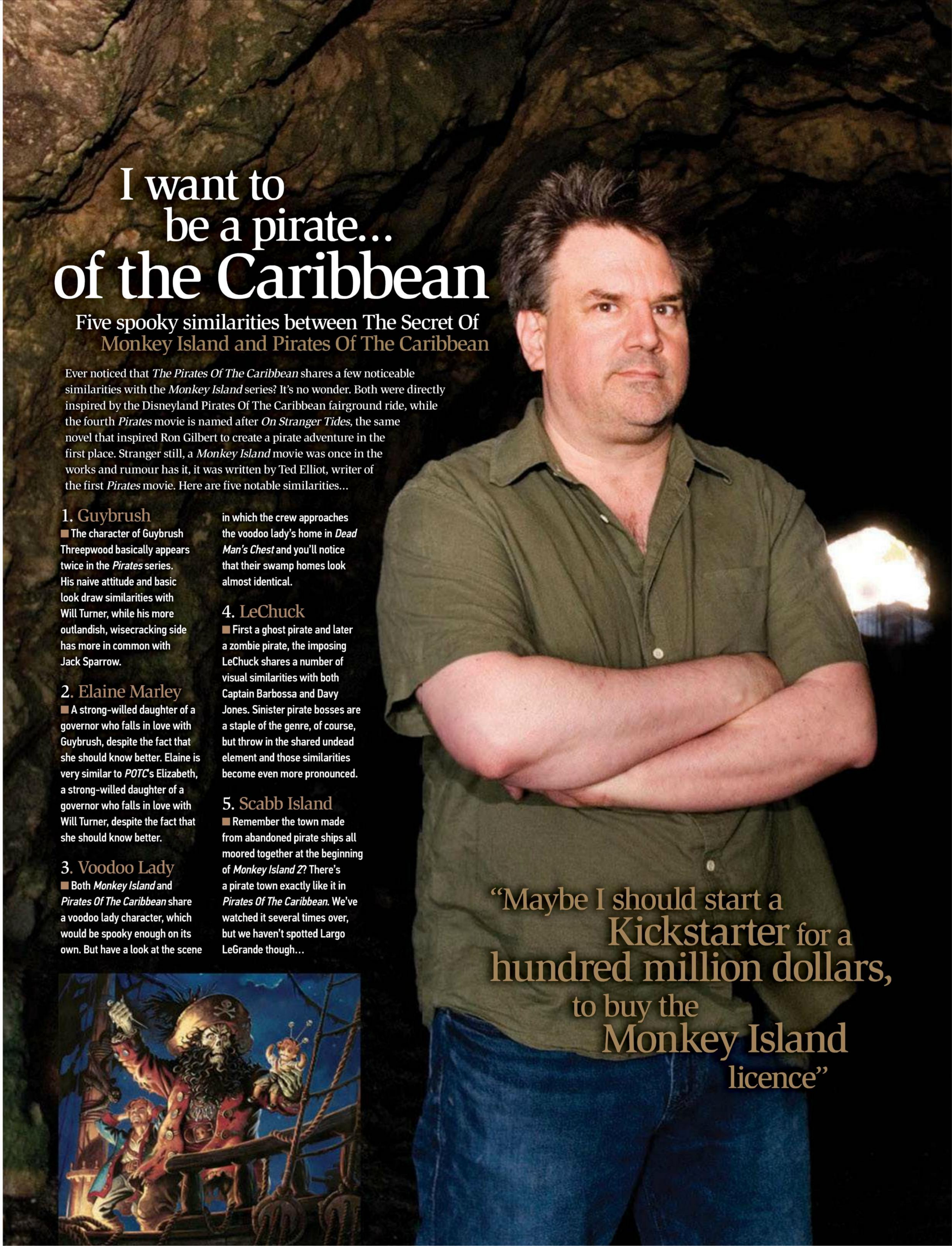
2012: As the years go by, Telltale Games attracts more attention and gains the rights to produce adventures based on ever more commercial licences. *Back To The Future* and *Jurassic Park* achieve mixed results, but it's *The Walking Dead* that really hits the spot, capturing its subject matter perfectly while honing Telltale's episodic craft and introducing Quantic Dream-style causality.



2012: More genre diversification, this time from Ragnar Tørnquist, creator of adventure game torchbearers *The Longest Journey* and *Dreamfall*. His MMO, *The Secret World* takes mechanics from adventure gaming and reuses them in a massively multiplayer context.



2013: Adventure gaming comes full circle as the genre returns to the place where it began… a colossal cave. This long-awaited new Ron Gilbert adventure revisits ideas from *Maniac Mansion* but predates it as an idea, dating back in conception to even before Gilbert worked at Lucasfilm.



I want to be a pirate… of the Caribbean

Five spooky similarities between The Secret Of Monkey Island and Pirates Of The Caribbean

Ever noticed that *The Pirates Of The Caribbean* shares a few noticeable similarities with the *Monkey Island* series? It's no wonder. Both were directly inspired by the Disneyland Pirates Of The Caribbean fairground ride, while the fourth *Pirates* movie is named after *On Stranger Tides*, the same novel that inspired Ron Gilbert to create a pirate adventure in the first place. Stranger still, a *Monkey Island* movie was once in the works and rumour has it, it was written by Ted Elliot, writer of the first *Pirates* movie. Here are five notable similarities…

1. Guybrush

The character of Guybrush Threepwood basically appears twice in the *Pirates* series. His naive attitude and basic look draw similarities with Will Turner, while his more outlandish, wisecracking side has more in common with Jack Sparrow.

2. Elaine Marley

A strong-willed daughter of a governor who falls in love with Guybrush, despite the fact that she should know better. Elaine is very similar to *POTC*'s Elizabeth, a strong-willed daughter of a governor who falls in love with Will Turner, despite the fact that she should know better.

3. Voodoo Lady

Both *Monkey Island* and *Pirates Of The Caribbean* share a voodoo lady character, which would be spooky enough on its own. But have a look at the scene in which the crew approaches the voodoo lady's home in *Dead Man's Chest* and you'll notice that their swamp homes look almost identical.

4. LeChuck

First a ghost pirate and later a zombie pirate, the imposing LeChuck shares a number of visual similarities with both Captain Barbossa and Davy Jones. Sinister pirate bosses are a staple of the genre, of course, but throw in the shared undead element and those similarities become even more pronounced.

5. Scabb Island

Remember the town made from abandoned pirate ships all moored together at the beginning of *Monkey Island 2*? There's a pirate town exactly like it in *Pirates Of The Caribbean*. We've watched it several times over, but we haven't spotted Largo LeGrande though…

"Maybe I should start a Kickstarter for a hundred million dollars, to buy the Monkey Island licence"



Gilbert cites *Limbo* as a major influence on *The Cave*, but cautions that the gameplay is nothing alike: "[*The Cave*] is a game about objects, it's a game about finding things, it's a game about using them in connection with other things. It's not a game about physics puzzles like *Limbo* was."

I think gaming has become a lot broader; as kids have grown up, they're now adults and they have families and they have kept playing games. Now there are a lot more diverse people out there, and things like adventure games – which were kind of a niche of a niche, because gaming was a niche, and adventure gaming was a niche within that – well, now that gaming is very broad, the adventure game niche is much broader."

HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT in spite of this growth, standard publishing remains inhospitable: "Traditional publishers are always going to follow that movie model. They're all trying to make the summer blockbuster. But I think the movie industry is an interesting analogy, because all the [movie] studios do want to make the summer blockbusters, but they do also make a whole lot of other movies, too. They make movies they know are not going to be summer blockbusters. The game industry got to this point, maybe five years ago, where all they would ever make are summer blockbusters." But even this is starting to change: "I think we're slowly maturing as an industry to where [publishers] want to make the summer blockbusters, but like the movie industry they're also willing to fund smaller games that aren't going to be blockbusters. I think we're slowly starting to see that happen." He adds that digital distribution is making a big difference: "If you had to press DVDs of all these games, and inventory, you really were locked into making these very large, big-money bets on stuff. With digital distribution, it does allow people to make smaller bets on stuff and serve more niche markets, because you don't have to convince Best Buy to give you shelf space."

With industry perceptions gradually changing (and in light of gamers' $3.5 million response to Schafer's Kickstarter campaign), would Gilbert consider tackling a more traditional point-and-click game after *The Cave* is finished? "That's a good question. I've certainly asked myself about that," he says, after a long pause. "There are things I do not like about traditional adventure games, and I would want to figure out solutions to those. I think there are solutions, clever solutions for that kind of stuff. I really like the dialogue puzzles, the dialogue interactions – that was kind of a mainstay of *DeathSpank*, those [dialogue puzzles] and the humour. I really do enjoy those a lot, [and they're] something that I consciously did not do in *The Cave*. So that's something I would really like to get back to." After some more consideration, he continues: "I guess the long answer is yes, I think it would be really fun to do [a traditional point-and-click game], but I'd want to figure out where they need to go. Not just relive the past, but really, where does point-and-click need to go in the future?"

WITH SO MUCH talk of moving forward, it seems almost rude to ask about *Monkey Island*, but one can't talk shop with Ron Gilbert without bringing up his greatest legacy. This time, his answer comes easily: "I would actually really enjoy making another [*Monkey Island* game] – the real, third *Monkey Island* game. But my caveat has always been: if I'm going to do that, I want to do it my way. And I don't want LucasArts telling me that it has to be a certain way, or that this isn't faithful to the *Monkey Island* universe, or anything like that. I just want to make my third *Monkey Island* game, I'd really like to do that." He's quick to add that the odds are slim: "I mean, unless I'm in George [Lucas]'s will, I don't think that's going to happen." Though he was encouraged by the brief revival that occurred in 2009 with LucasArts' Special Edition rereleases and Telltale's episodic *Tales of Monkey Island*, he isn't holding his breath for further developments: "I was in some serious talks with LucasArts at the time about doing a new *Monkey Island*. When their president [Darrell Rodriguez] was fired (or quit), all that ended instantly. They have never brought it up again."

In spite of recent fund-raising successes by retro adventure game designers like Al Lowe and the *Space Quest* creators, Gilbert doesn't see crowd-funding as a viable option for gaining control of his creation: "The problem is that Lucasfilm hoards intellectual property. And George does not need any more money, right? I think if I showed up at their doorstep with a briefcase full of ten million dollars, they would not sell me the licence. It would have to be an obscenely absurd amount of money to pry that licence away from them. So yeah, I don't think Kickstarter would ever… I mean, maybe I should start a Kickstarter for a hundred million dollars, to buy the *Monkey Island* licence. You never know."

"It should have been a better game and a real RPG, but there were people in charge who felt console gamers wouldn't like a real RPG," Gilbert says of *DeathSpank*, adding, "I think *Torchlight* proved they would."



Does Gilbert see adventure games making a comeback among the mainstream audience? "I think people are more willing to look at, if not pure point-and-click adventure games, they're much more willing to look at hybrid adventure games, like *LA Noire*."

Even with *Monkey Island* off the table, the self-proclaimed Grumpy Gamer seems content with where he's landed. He and *DeathSpank* co-creator Clayton Kauzlaric recently released an independent game, *The Big Big Castle*, for iPad (reviewed on page 113 of this issue). And after haunting him for almost 30 years, *The Cave* is finally nearing completion. Though much has changed in the industry, Gilbert confesses that working on *The Cave* feels a lot like working on *Maniac Mansion* or *Monkey Island*, way back when. "Compared to LucasArts, it's not that different, which isn't actually surprising considering Tim came from LucasArts and spent his formative game-making years at LucasArts. In a lot of ways, things are modelled after those early days," he says of the atmosphere at Double Fine. "So it's really nice, there's a lot of creative freedom, there's respect for creative people, there aren't a lot of business people coming around and trying to get you to do things. Plus the people here are amazingly talented, the artists and programmers. It's an absolute thrill to be working with them."



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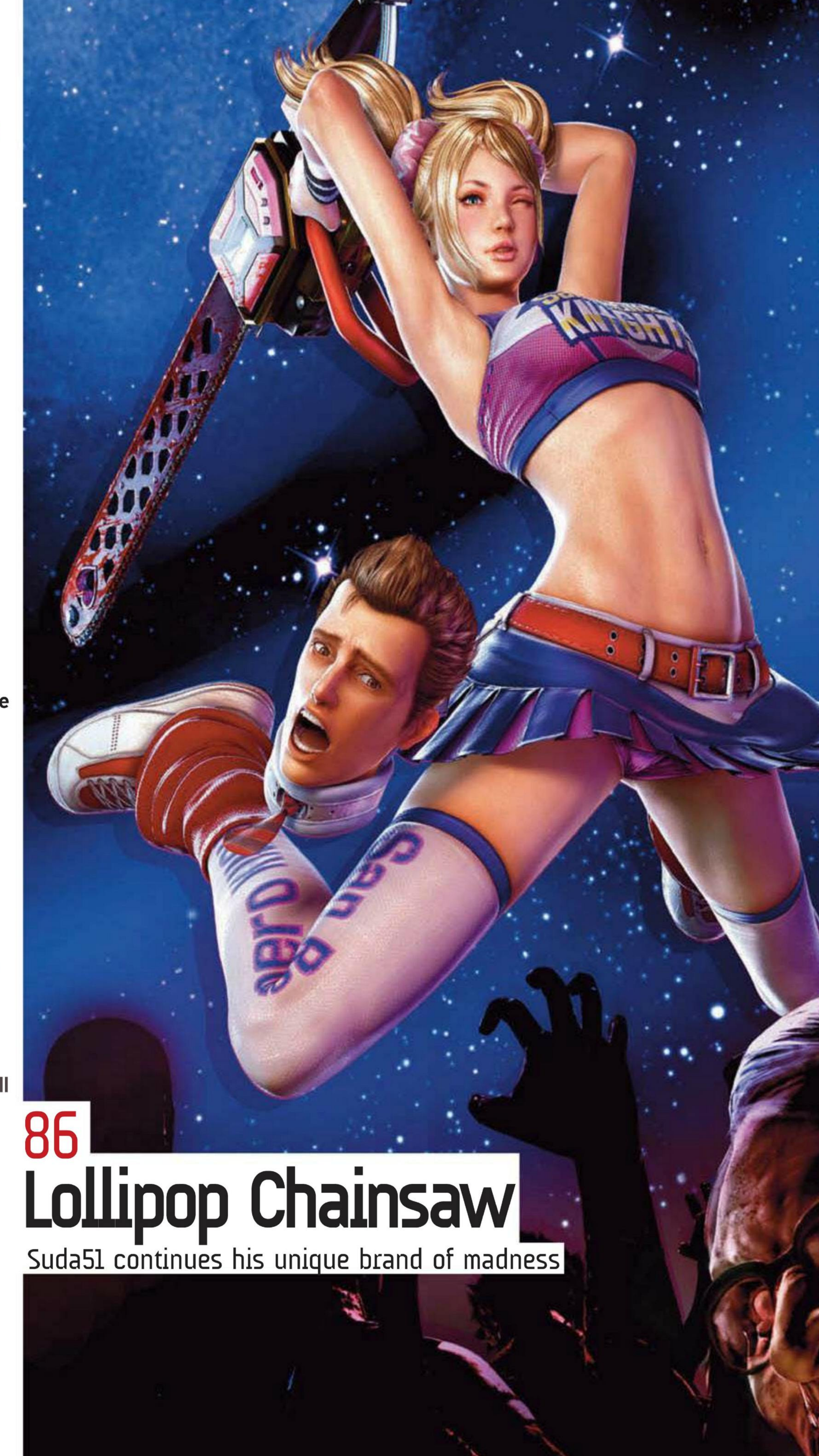
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Reviews

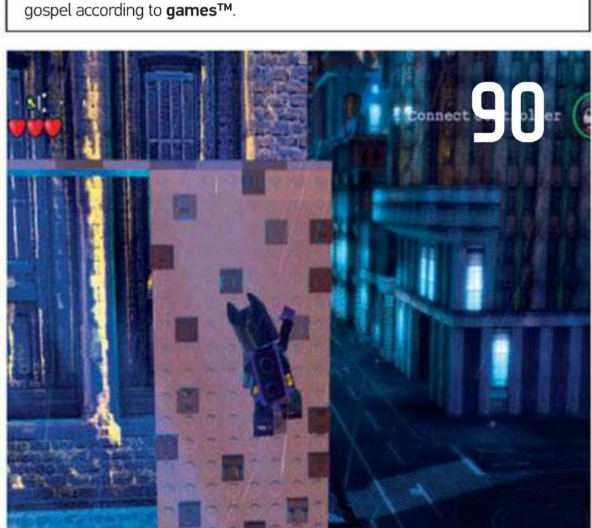




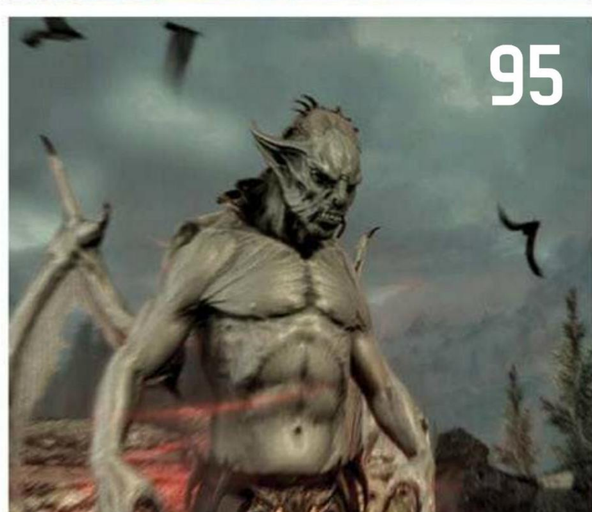
THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.







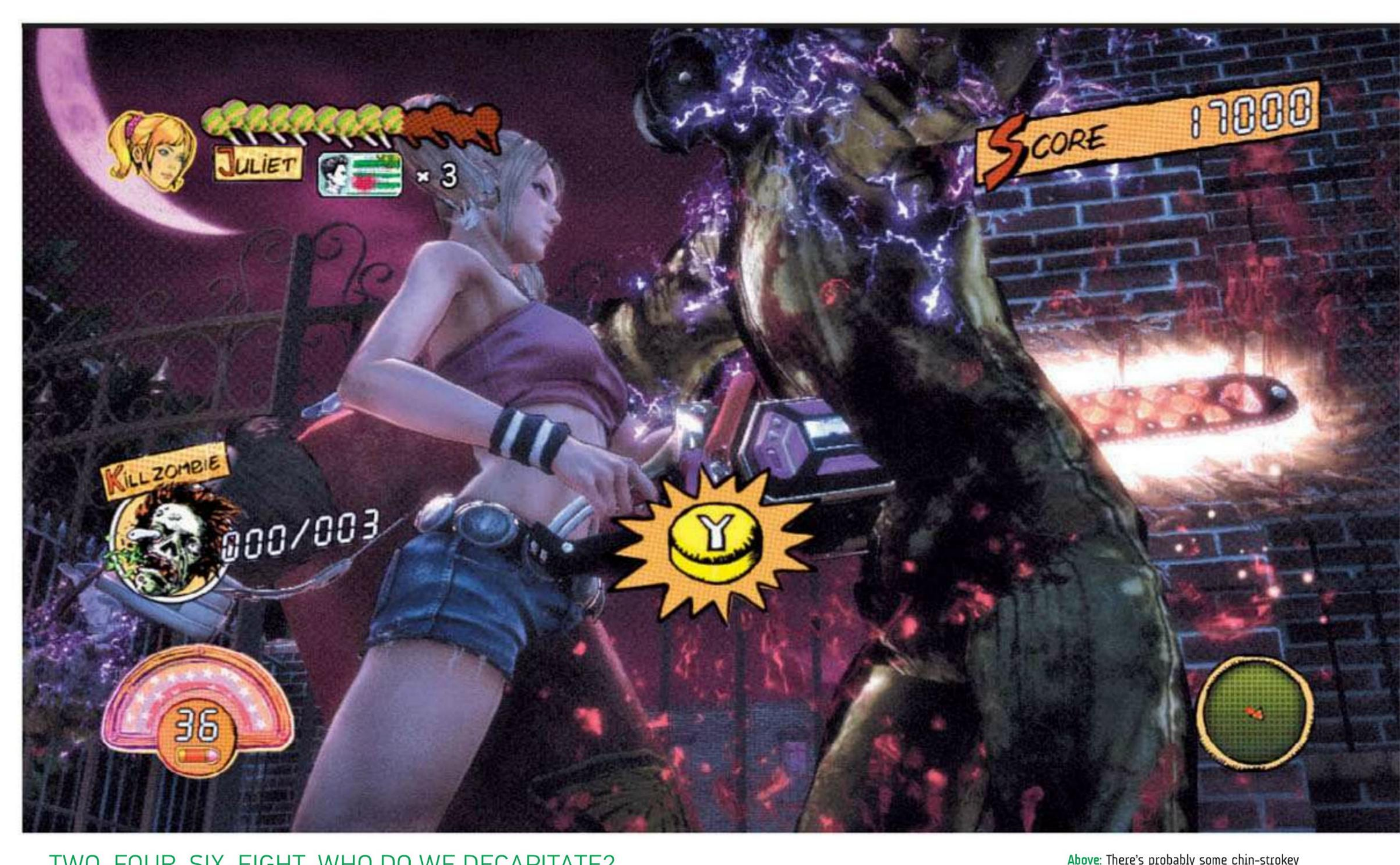






ONLINE REVIEWS

With online elements making up a greater portion of some gaming packages, a slight tweak in the way games are reviewed has come about. More online multiplayer modes are made available to us at review stage, so it's only fair that these are taken into consideration where appropriate, and not ignored. After all, if the company in question deems them important enough to present at review stage, then we feel it unfair to purposely overlook them. This will also provide a fairer representation to you. In this way, we can help identify, and not punish, titles with an online focus and only negligible solo play. In cases where valuable online components aren't available for review, we'll mark the Online Reviewed box with 'No' and will, if necessary, revisit the title once time has been spent with it online, so nobody misses out. When online elements are non-existent or inconsequential you'll find 'N/A' in the space.



Above: There's probably some chin-strokey remark to be made here about gender, sexualisation and fetishised characters. But that would be boring.

TWO, FOUR, SIX, EIGHT, WHO DO WE DECAPITATE?

Lollipop Chainsaw

After a string of critically acclaimed but commercially disappointing games, we had genuine fears that Grasshopper Manufacture might choose to go a bit mainstream with its next big game. Published by Warner Bros, written by a Hollywood screenwriter and dealing with American pop-culture staples as broad as cheerleaders and zombies, Lollipop Chainsaw certainly looked like it might have lost that crucial element of madness that defines Grasshopper. Thankfully, we were dead wrong on this occasion.

Lollipop Chainsaw may well be the most American game to ever be made in Japan. But it's an America as filtered through twisted minds. Yes, Juliet Starling is a Valley Girl cheerleader with expensive clothing tastes and typical high-school concerns but she also hails from a family of zombie hunters. Plus, her boyfriend, Nick, is a disembodied head, cut off from his body to protect him from a zombie virus and attached to Juliet's belt while she figures out what to do with him. It's a bit sick, very stupid and a great antidote to a generation of console games that take themselves too seriously.

It's not just the story either. The silliness of Lollipop Chainsaw's premise is perfectly married to its gameplay – an old-school action romp that's pre-Devil May Cry in its complexity and is distinctly reminiscent of Dreamcast-era design in its arcadey sense of instant gratification. Combat is ostensibly simple, with buttons for high and low chainsaw swings, a melee attack for dazing zombies, and a jump that can be combined with other attacks. So the barrier to entry is much lower than a technical brawler like Bayonetta. New moves can be bought with the coins you collect from fallen zombies, but those moves only increase the variety of attacks you can perform, not the difficulty of combinations. You won't have to count frames, cancel attacks or perform guard breaks, and button mashing isn't just tolerated, it's essential.

That's not to say Lollipop Chainsaw is without challenge. It's easy to become overwhelmed if you let the large number of zombies get the better of you. So crowd control is important, whether that be through battering zombies into a stunned daze, leapfrogging over them into a chainsaw

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros
DEVELOPER: Grasshopper Manufacture
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

YOU WON'T HAVE TO COUNT FRAMES, CANCEL ATTACKS OR PERFORM GUARD BREAKS, AND BUTTON MASHING ISN'T JUST TOLERATED, IT'S ESSENTIAL

FAQs

Q. WHAT'S ON THE SOUNDTRACK?
With Akira (Silent Hill) Yamaoka and Jimmy (Mindless Self Indulgence) Urine on soundtrack duties, you know it'll sound ace.

Q. SO WHAT'S ON IT?
It's an eclectic range of tracks including original compositions that cross over many genres and licensed tracks as wide ranging as The Chordettes, Children Of Bodom and The Human League.

Q. SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE?
Yes and they're expertly used to suit each situation or stage played in. You can customise Juliet's MP3 playlist too.



Below: Like No More Heroes before it, Lollipop Chainsaw splashes vibrant imagery all over its screen, relishing its status as a videogame. It's the way things should be.





Right: You can't buy new moves from the mid-level shops during score attack. Instead, the shop comes to life and tries to kill you.

Below: In case you were concerned that there was no actual cheerleading in Lollipop Chainsaw, don't worry. Grasshopper thought of that.

combo or keeping the horde at bay with a few shots of Juliet's Chainsaw Blaster.

Zombie games are at their best when you're completely surrounded, and in Lollipop Chainsaw you practically look forward to a crowd, precisely because this provides the best opportunity to show off your moves, especially if you have a power meter charged to the top. Activate one of these and you can cut through any enemy in a single strike. Cut through three or more at once and the screen slows into a dazzling spectacle of glitter and blood as their heads pop off and shower special coins down on Juliet. Those coins are used to buy new clothes or tunes for her MP3 player, so it's no wonder she looks so happy as she poses victoriously, the words Sparkle Hunting proudly emblazoned above her. With the sort of pyrotechnic celebration of achievement that only videogames do so well, it's hard not to share Juliet's elation, making the combat oh so satisfying.

As you'd expect, new challenges are added as you go along. Flying zombies (blood pouring from their severed legs), crawling zombies, flame-throwing fire-fighter zombies, charging American footballer zombies and so many more, expand the sorts of threats Juliet must contend with, perfectly in parallel with her growing moveset. It's a textbook example of how to escalate a core gameplay mechanic over the course of a linear action game, ensuring that monotony never sets in.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of the game mechanics outside of the central zombie-slaying. This being a Goichi Suda creation, Lollipop Chainsaw is littered with mini-games that detract from the overall experience just as often as they complement it. Like No More Heroes and Shadows Of The Damned before it, the inclusion of mini-games, particularly the retro game pastiches present in the stage where Juliet visits the local arcade, feel like an indulgence of creative urges more than a necessary feature. They can be fun, of course, but they're often sloppy in execution, lacking the polish to justify their own inclusion and dragging the excitement factor down below that of the main game. In No More Heroes 2, Suda managed to get the balance right, making such diversions optional, but when they're forced on you, as they are here, it's easy to resent them.

Still, if you're a Grasshopper fan then you know what to expect by now. Mechanically accomplished, stylistically exceptional yet littered with sloppy indulgences, Lollipop Chainsaw is another typical Suda game. You either love it or hate it. But if you fall into the former camp then there's much more to love here than ever before. The partnership with James Gunn (writer of such wasterpieces as Slither and Tromeo And Juliet) is a much better fit to Suda's style than we ever could have dreamed. Every grubby, obscene or just plain daft line of dialogue fits so well that we wouldn't mind if Gunn became a permanent member of Grasshopper's "videogame band". Conversations shared between Juliet and Nick are among the funniest that videogames have to offer, and the range of pop-culture references Gunn weaves in (including an unexpected nod to Michael Bublé of all people) make this the most western-friendly game to come out of the studio without sacrificing its brand of lunacy. This is definitely something worth cheering about.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

DADDY ISSUES: There's no multiplayer, but it features leaderboards for each of its stages. It also features offline leaderboards, with default scores set by Juliet's family. Her dad is always number one.

POST-GAME ANALYSIS

Despite being mostly excellent, Grasshopper's Shadows Of The Damned attracted criticism for not featuring any post-game content or extra modes. Lollipop Chainsaw doesn't respond too well to those criticisms. You can replay levels in score attack, medal attack or time attack flavours, but there's little difference between these and the main game that you might as well play through that again, rinsing it for silver coins to unlock bonus costumes. Score attack lacks visual feedback necessary to indicate whether combos are racking up a decent score or not. Bayonetta this isn't, and nor should it try to be.

BETTER THAN: ONECHANBARA: BIKINI SAMURAI SQUAD



WORSE THAN: BAYONETTA

VERDICT 8/10
A TREAT YOU'LL LOVE, BUT YOUR PARENTS WILL DISAPPROVE

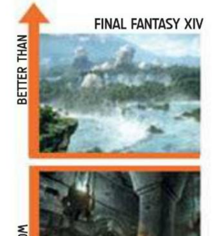
SPILLING THE BEANS ON MMO GAMING'S WORST-KEPT SECRET.

The Secret World

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Norway
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Funcom
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: 3 July
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer
MINIMUM SPEC: ONLINE: 2.6GHz dual core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 Radeon HD3850 512MB, XP
REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
FINAL FANTASY XIV



WORSE THAN
AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

Funcom isn't the most prolific MMO developer – to date, it has two MMORPGs under its belt, Anarchy Online and Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures. But the Norwegian developer has been at it for over a decade now; weathering economic storms and evolving online communities, yet still staying competitive. We'd describe the build up to the release of The Secret World as 'tentative', not that there hasn't been the usual marketing flurry associated with a new launch, but there has been little mention of genre-busting or breaking the mould, not from Funcom anyway. And yet, The Secret World is the only major MMO in these turbulent times that could come close to making this claim without shuffling its feet nervously and crossing its fingers behind its back.

It's distinguished by its setting, a world of cabals and clandestine groups where a surreal multi-dimensional backdrop of magic and monsters meets modern society in a remarkably Phillip Pullman way. Its nine-year development is evident in its lore and detail: we're running around a contemporary metropolitan street, replete with pop-culture references and swearing natives, but The Secret World seething with nefarious magic and otherworld creatures that surface elsewhere. "You're not the chosen one," you're told by one of the three main factions in the game, and sure enough, whether you're aligned with The Templars, The Illuminati or The Dragon, the glowing bug that flew into your character's mouth in the opening credits will dutifully familiarise itself with your gob and somehow impart its powers. The three factions are ostensibly on the same team anyway, having set their differences aside to tackle the supernatural creatures that have popped up all over the planet.

Faction headquarters are based in London, New York and Seoul for Templars, Illuminati and Dragon respectively, and after a little bit of being nudged from pillar to post, generally



Above: The best solution to any giant crustacean problem: the shotgun, of course.

Below: Kingston, an early port of call featuring a town overrun by undead. Each zone has been divided into distinct themes like this, and here Funcom has clearly jumped on the popular zombie bandwagon.

FAQs

Q. HOW BIG IS IT?
There are a dozen or so main zones, each a few miles square.

Q. WHEN DO I LEVEL?
A big 'SP' or 'AP' pops up on the screen to let you know you have new points to spend.

Q. WHY IS IT SECRET?
For the societies, the people affected by the monster outbreaks and your character, it's not a secret world.

Below: The Secret World does adhere to some MMO conventions: it's best to collect quests in one area to kill multiple birds with one stone, for example. And some bosses will be too hard to tackle alone. This is a massively multiplayer game, and many hands make light work.



CRAFTY

In classic MMOs, crafting is certainly a learned skill, ground out to grand-mastery over many hundreds of hours. In The Secret World, you are given a box. You subsequently put any artefact that's dropped off a mob into the box and then proceed to break it up into its component parts. The part can then be combined with other parts in order to create new items, provided that you have the recipe for it. Simple – and certainly far more accessible a system than the myriad of tiers, quests and progression systems that traditional RPGs tend to force you through, before you can forge that piece of armour made obsolete by your current kit by the time you are ready to craft it.

POKING AROUND OUR CHARACTER TAB TO TRY AND GET A SENSE OF OUR PROGRESSION, WE FELL DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

being taught to suck eggs, we eventually found ourselves at Kingstown. This southern-US backwater has been overrun by zombies and it's up to us to cut our teeth ticking off fetch and kill quests for the locals... except something is different. For a start, it has detail unlike any other MMO we've encountered: there's a bespoke feel to the books and notes we read, surprising environmental accessibility, many more objects in the world can be interacted with than usual and, as a part of a new generation, DirectX 11 visuals challenge the limits of what we'd credit an MMO as capable of achieving.

We approached with a blasé attitude to what we thought would be a formulaic grind, well-armoured as we were with a decade of MMO experience ourselves to the trials modern MMORPGs can pose. Sure enough, combat saw us hitting skill buttons, managing cooldowns, reaping XP and dragging trains into safe zones whenever the odds were overwhelming, but we didn't seem to be levelling up. So poking around our character tab to try and get a sense of our progression, we fell down the rabbit hole.

The Secret World has no levels, in the traditional sense, at least. Gaining experience fills a bar that releases a skill point when filled and an ability point when one third full, which are used to purchase new skills and abilities in your character's ability wheel. This experience bar is fixed in length and doesn't grow exponentially as per MMO standard, so you can stay in your favourite grinding spot or chain repeatable quests ad infinitum and, as your power grows, it will become easier to farm experience in that way. But the cost for skills and abilities increases with development, so eventually you'll see sense in tackling a higher-level area that offers greater experience and thus faster AP and SP rewards.

The advantage of this system is that a high-level character that is maxing out in a certain area can choose a new skill and take it through rapid development with a relatively small amount of work in a high-level zone. Although you are limited to a small number of skills and abilities you can equip (because The Secret World doesn't bind you to a class), all skills and abilities are available to every character. It means that alts are somewhat redundant (though a standard account allows you three character slots, potentially one for each faction) and a single character can switch roles to suit whatever mission they're embarking on or party they're a part of. Funcom has even templated a dozen or so classes you can switch to in case you're at a loss, and you can save favourite skill/ability loadouts to access them any time in the future.

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MODERN DAY SETTING: Seoul, London and New York have been authentically recreated, although we don't remember there being a Templar recruitment office in Piccadilly Circus.

It's a remarkably elegant solution to a problem that developers have wrestled with for years: there's no getting away from the grind but this seamless compromise gives control over the reward to the player, rather than backing them into a corner where they're bored of their high-level character yet unwilling to invest hundreds of hours into a new class. That's when people start sniffing around for a new game to play.

The Secret World's weakness is the paranormal hub world of Agartha, which links the parts of the planet together via dimensional portals and a sort of treetop roller coaster, the novelty of which gets old quickly. Agartha breaks The Secret World into smaller chunks, so you lose that sense of scale you might have had staring across to the next horizon. It's a step-back to the old Everquest generation where 'zoning' was necessary, only it's being forced by a concept rather than limited technology.

There's admittedly room for some improvement in The Secret World, as there often is with new MMO launches, however, this is far more promising than anything Blizzard or EA have had to offer recently.





YUP, THOSE TOYS ARE STILL WONDERFUL

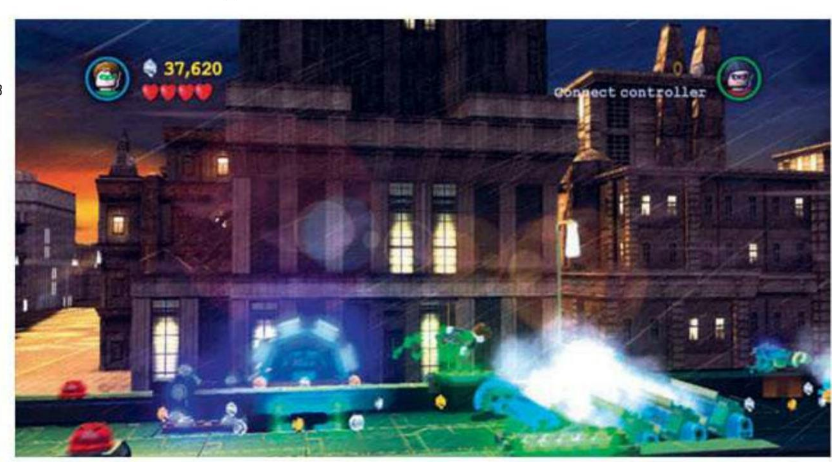
Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes

Right: Chase sequences last far too long. They usually start off strong, too – it's just a pity they almost always outstay their welcome.

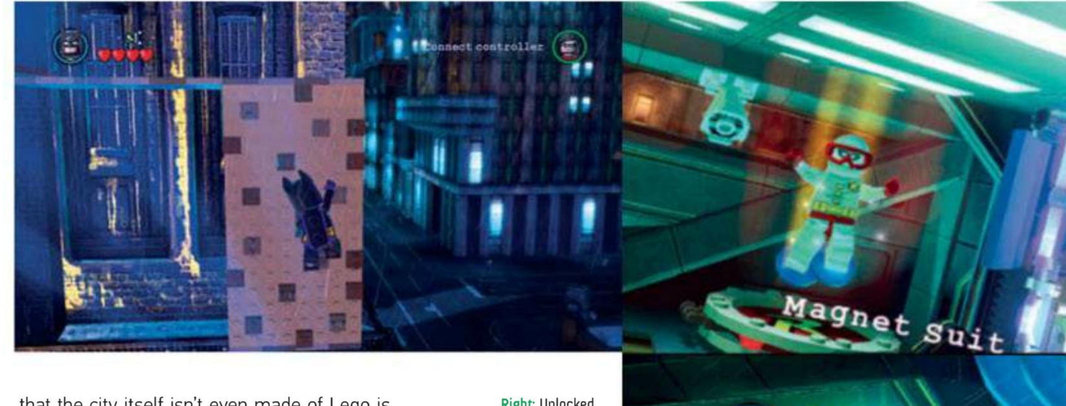
Honestly, it's like we've gone back in time 20 years. We seem to have reached a point where the word 'Lego' is a license to print money once again – simply attach it to the front of any existing franchise and watch the coffers fill. Whether it's an old franchise like Indy, a more recent one (at least in movie terms) like *Pirates* or *Harry Potter*, or a timeless classic like *Star Wars*, transforming all of the characters in any given series into claw-handed yellow caricatures, it's a proven recipe for success. But this is a formula that works best when given the opportunity to riff on classic scenes, slapstick comedy and visual gags based on the blocky nature of the toys in question used to subvert and reimagine iconic pop-culture moments. To combat this problem – one of the main issues with the original *Lego Batman*, it must be said – Traveller's Tales has elected to give the toys a voice. Well, one each. But either way, it's not something that sits particularly comfortably with the freedom and reliance upon imagination for which the Danish brand is so rightly revered.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros
DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Below: Trials litter the open world of Gotham City, extended suit-switching challenges where the reward is usually a Gold Brick. Woo.



That's not to say that it isn't well handled because for the most part, it absolutely is. The script and performances are both more than fit for purpose and hit the occasional high, although no witty retort is ever going to match the silent shrugs and overly confident flourishes that made the silent-movie approach so successful in this format. With the power of dialogue at their disposal, cut-scenes take on a new-found and ill-fitting sense of self-importance – there's a nauseating air of smugness about it in places, while other scenes seem to have been penned before the decision to turn it into a talkie were made. It's tricky to peg down whether the shift actually works or not, and while it certainly helps in terms of exposition in trying to tell an original story, you can't help but feel that at times, it's just using its new voice to paraphrase jokes that would fare far better had they not been translated from the visual language of Lego games past.

Vocal toys aren't the only bone of contention here, either. *Lego Batman 2* needed a hook in order to be in any way relevant and in an open world Gotham City setting, it created such a place to hang its plastic cowl. But to offer such an inviting bullet point only to reveal that the city itself isn't even made of Lego is almost to cheat fans – there are entire areas of Windsor and Billund devoted to the fact that smaller versions of places made out of Lego are impossible to hate, so to see this odd take on Gotham so sparsely employ such brick-based architecture is saddening indeed. Again, it's a shallow criticism as the world itself is relatively expansive and gloriously rendered but it can be horribly jarring at times to see, say, a toy Batmobile careering around a CG forest. *Lego Star Wars III* had an almost 'back garden' feel to its non-plastic

Right: Unlocked characters can often bypass the need to switch suits when replaying levels, which is like a dream come true.

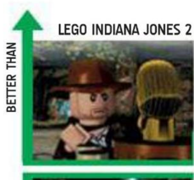


THERE ARE FEW MORE POWERFUL SMILE CATALYSTS IN MODERN GAMING THAN A LEGO GAME IN FULL SWING



BETTER THAN

LEGO INDIANA JONES 2





WORSE THAN

LEGO STAR WARS III: THE CLONE WARS

FAQs

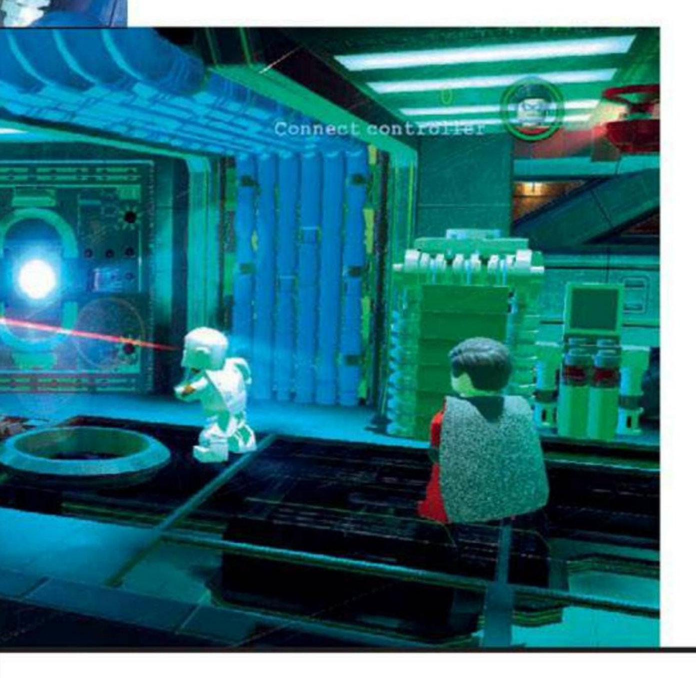
Q. DC SUPER HEROES, YOU SAY?
Yeah, but they don't show up until the end and their powers make Batman and Robin look useless.

Q. HOW SO?
Superman alone can perform all but a couple of the abilities of the Dynamic Duo in all of their different utility suits.

Q. IS THERE MUCH TO DO?
Loads. Gold bricks, unlockable characters and replaying old levels will soak up hours.

INJUSTICE LEAGUE

While Batman might be the headline act, and we wouldn't want it any other way, the fact that the rest of the DC stars even get mentioned on the bill at all is something of an oddity. Outside of Superman – who actually shows up early in order to play the 'look how much better I am than you idiots' card – the rest of the crew don't really make an appearance until the game is drawing to a close. Their main purpose seems to be post-game fun, many of the unlockable guys and gals only serving to fill multiple roles when you come to replay old missions. It all feels a little underthought, although it's difficult to see how the main game would have been structured had a more even share of the spotlight been offered to the rest of the DC cast…



environments, offering the feeling of a backyard reenactment to its battles, but *Lego Batman 2* has nothing of the sort – it's all synthetic and digital, no matter how good it may look.

Yet despite such criticism, it's rather difficult not to enjoy something so evidently professional – the labours of a developer that has honed its craft over countless incrementally better games. Whether enjoyed alone or with a friend or family member, it's undoubtedly a beautifully designed celebration of cooperation, and from its character-switching puzzles to its moment-on-moment gameplay, there are few more powerful smile catalysts in modern gaming than a Lego game in full swing. Veterans might find some elements overly familiar, sure, and the hardcore will likely bemoan the fact that it never gets any more challenging than maintaining a grip on the controller to prevent it from falling to the floor. But these are just more arguments for Traveller's Tales' offerings being the gaming equivalent of Pixar's output – these aren't games designed for you, though you're every bit as welcome to enjoy them as the younger target audience. There's even the same kind of payoff in terms of jokes and references that the youngsters just won't get. Granted, it's probably more *Cars* than *Toy Story*, but the Pixar comparison holds up all the same.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TALKING TOYS: The original *Lego Batman* struggled to tell a story without the grounding of a movie. Letting the little guys talk gets around this, but it's not an approach that will prove to everyone's tastes.

And as if the Lego games weren't already enough of a time sink for players young and old alike, the open world setting affords *Lego Batman 2* new ways to keep players from going elsewhere. Side missions and hidden blocks are suitably distracting, although the use of a difficult-to-read radar over a mini-map displays a certain level of open world naivety that should probably be expected from a developer that has just been going through the motions for so long. There's plenty to do so long as you can find your way to it in the first place, though it must be said that flying characters and vehicles do make this far less of a chore.

This is not a franchise that ever needed to be chucking its easily lost plastic hat into *GTA*'s open world ring, so the shift in format is admirable if not entirely successful. If nothing else, it serves as evidence that Traveller's Tales is listening to its critics and is unwilling to sit back as 'those guys that keep making the same Lego game'. *Pirates* slipped back into the old format a little but between this and *The Clone Wars*, the studio has made it evident that it is keen to push new ideas on a franchise that has such comfortable, money-stuffed laurels constantly beckoning it to take a load off.

VERDICT 7/10
TRADITIONAL LEGO FARE REFRAMED TO MIXED EFFECT

A SPOONY BARD'S TALE

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy

What do *Contra*, *Final Fantasy*, *Maniac Mansion*, *Mega Man*, *Metal Gear*, *R-Type*, *Shinobi* and *Street Fighter* have in common? Answer: They're all celebrating their 25th birthday in 2012. We use the word "celebrating" loosely, of course. Some of these franchises are dead and buried, while others will merely be celebrated with re-packaged compilations – hardly the tribute these titans of game history deserve. But *Final Fantasy* is different. Square Enix has decided to mark a quarter century of phoenix downs and summons in interactive form, befitting the medium that we love.

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy doesn't just commemorate the *FF* heritage by bringing together characters from the first 13 games in the series, however; it goes further than that, tapping into one of the most popular and nostalgic parts of *FF* fandom – its music.

Using mechanics similar to that of *Ouendan/ Elite Beat Agents*, *Theatrhythm* sensibly keeps complexity low, recognising that its audience is *FF* fans first and rhythm-action players second. Only taps, holds and swipes of the stylus are required, and the prompts look the same no matter whether you're playing a battle music scene, field music or event music. Only the direction the notes come from will be different.

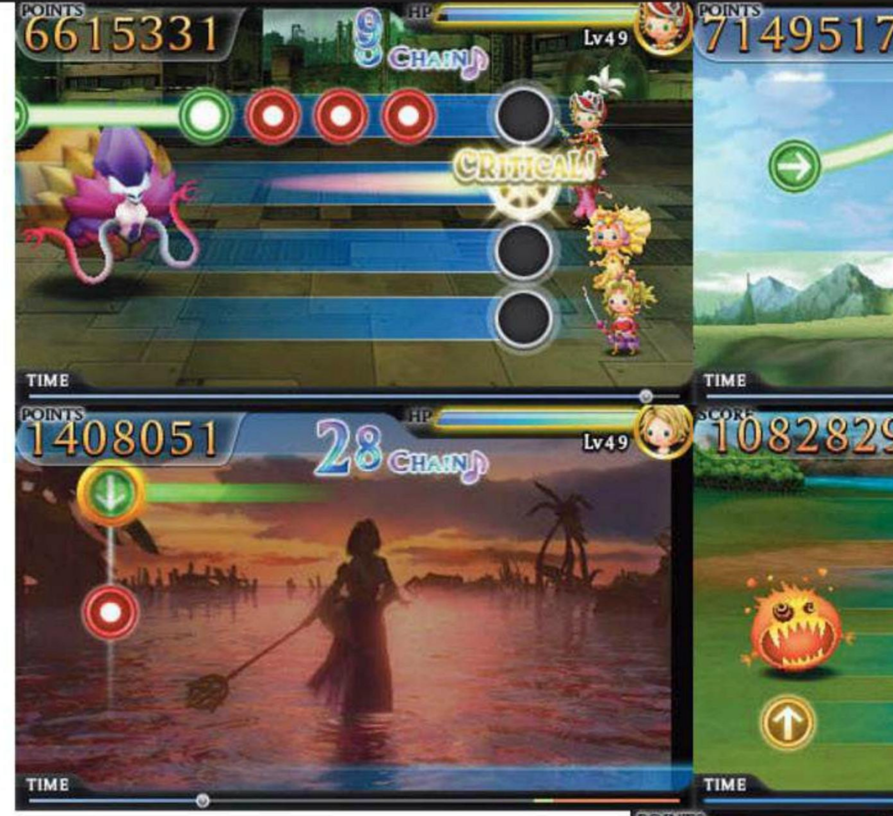
The focus, therefore, is very much on enjoying the tunes. Which is presumably why a new save file defaults to the easiest difficulty so that the barrier to entry is as low as possible. Experienced rhythm action players may find it frustrating to slog through the Basic difficulty level to unlock Expert and Ultimate difficulties, but it's just about worth it. On these levels, the tunes really come to life and, like any great rhythm-action game, you'll find your hand movements dance perfectly in synchronisation with the music, tapping into the brain's pleasure receptors in the way the genre does so well.

Square Enix has previously commented that it had to think very carefully about what tracks to include in *Theatrhythm*. Three playable tunes per game are included on the cartridge (one battle, one event and one field tune) and the producers have done a fine job of choosing tracks that are popular among *Final Fantasy* fans while also satisfying the gameplay requirements of the rhythm-action genre.

Final Fantasy music has become an industry in its own right, spawning countless album recordings and live shows, so it's great to see some of the most

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: indies zero
PRICE: £22.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Above: Watching scenes from classic games during the Event Music stages is one of the most crowd-pleasing elements of *Theatrhythm*.
Right: Each song contains a Feature zone that, should you hit all its notes, activates a special section. In battle it's a Summon while Event scenes activate an encore with extra game footage.





FINAL ENCORE

£22.99 for a 3DS game? That's pretty good isn't it? We are certain you will agree it is. games™ doesn't usually comment on value for money, but the 70 songs and wealth of content on offer in *Theatrhythm* make it an exceptional release. Why is it so cheap? We suspect that Square Enix hopes to make more money from DLC. 50 songs are planned for release, costing 90 pence each, and totalling an extra £45 if you buy the whole lot. The first batch is available now and includes a decent selection of songs from across the whole series, while later batches will branch out into *FF* games that are not currently represented on the cartridge, such as *Final Fantasy Type-0* and *Final Fantasy XIII-2*.





FAQs

Q. HOW MANY TUNES?
About 70 in total. 3 playable plus an intro and outro per game, and a handful of secret bonus tracks.

Q. ANY OMISSIONS?
FFVII's JENOVA is perhaps the most missed fan-favourite, but we're more perplexed by the total absence of *FFXIV* tracks. Is Square Enix really that embarrassed by it?

Q. IS IT IN THE DLC?
Not that we can tell. The not-yet released *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* is represented. Perhaps a sign that the game is still in development.

popular tunes represented in *Theatrhythm*. There would probably be a riot at Square Enix's office if One-Winged Angel wasn't represented, so it doesn't surprise us to see it here. It's not the best battle theme on the cart from a gameplay perspective, but it's definitely a challenging one and totally justifies its inclusion. *Final Fantasy VIII*'s Waltz For The Moon, meanwhile, is perhaps the greatest marriage of player input and game output, and as the FMV dance between Squall and Rinoa plays in the background, it provokes fuzzy nostalgia in exactly the way an anniversary release should.

Taking *Theatrhythm* beyond nostalgia and into a place that aims to evolve the rhythm-action genre as a whole, are the game's light RPG mechanics. An enticing prospect, this is the side of *Theatrhythm* we most struggled to comprehend before release and, well, we're still not sure we fully understand it. When starting the game you assemble a party of four from the thirteen *FF* protagonists on offer and equip them with spells and abilities, as well as a single item for the whole team. Each time you play you'll acquire new skills and items, and will earn experience points, allowing your characters to level up and equip more skills. This all makes perfect sense… Except there doesn't seem to be much of a compelling reason to do it.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ENGLISH PLEASE: *Theatrhythm* could have been localised better. Aeris's theme goes by its Japanese title, while the event movies from *FFI* use the Famicom recordings, and therefore Japanese text.

Most of the abilities can be used like training wheels, compensating for missed notes and reducing the chance of song failure. But they're no substitution for genuine rhythm-action skills, and won't help you reach those elusive S ranks. It's possible that some enable you to defeat enemies quicker during the battle music scenes of the game, leading to rarer encounters within the time it takes to play the song. But if that is the case, we've seen no indication of it and it certainly isn't explained in the game's tutorials. Which only leaves the fact that abilities can sometimes be used to help

FINAL FANTASY VIII'S WALTZ FOR THE MOON, MEANWHILE, IS PERHAPS THE GREATEST MARRIAGE OF PLAYER INPUT AND GAME OUTPUT



Above: Did we mention that *Theatrhythm* has Achievement-like trophies? Well it has quite a few, actually. One of them is earned by getting every colour of chocobo to appear in a Field scene. **Left:** All of the classic characters and enemies of the series have been redrawn in a puppet-theatre style, presumably to add consistency to their disparate appearances.

you find and unlock even more abilities. That would be unlocking for the sake of unlocking, which certainly has its appeal but is a little shallower than we'd hoped from the RPG/rhythm hybrid.

Still, there's no denying the basic appeal of tinkering around with a party and watching them level up or accrue more skills as you play. The vagaries of the mechanics even lend an experimental edge to proceedings, and players of loot-style RPGs in particular will get a kick out of customising their characters just to see what happens when they take them into a song.

The game does a great job of encouraging such players. There are tons of items to discover, new characters to unlock and, crucially, secret songs to find. Best of all for these players is the Chaos Shrine, which offers Dark Notes – two random songs grouped together on the highest difficulty and featuring possibly three boss monsters, who all drop one of three potential bits of rare loot. Shareable over *StreetPass*, these extend the life of *Theatrhythm* way beyond the main mode and wring the most out of the RPG mechanics… Whatever it is they do.

In summary, *Theatrhythm* is a very good rhythm-action game, and a confusing but compelling RPG. But, above all else, it is a nostalgic anniversary package that will be adored by *Final Fantasy* fans and sets a new benchmark for interactive celebrations.

VERDICT 8/10
AN ESSENTIAL GAME FOR *FF* MUSIC FANS

THE PRETTY GOOD SPIDER-MAN, MORE ACCURATELY

The Amazing Spider-Man

DETAILS

FORMAT: 360
OTHER FORMATS: PS3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Beenox
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

***The Amazing Spider-Man*, like the movie that it accompanies (but is set after) isn't terrible.** Which might be a surprise to those that still think it's 1993, but after years of passable to good licensed games (mainly those brilliant *Lego* games and Rocksteady's *Batman* titles, in fairness) we've come to expect more than the dross historically associated with tie-ins, and we've got it. *Amazing Spider-Man* isn't going to blow your mind, but it is going to give you a pretty decent recreation of New York to swing around in, enough fan service to keep Spidey's legions of followers engaged, and a whole bunch of a mechanics nicked from other, more successful franchises to keep the casual player interested. It might not be saying much, given the games that followed it, but this is the best *Spider-Man* game since *Spider-Man 2*.

Part of what makes it so is that Beenox has listened to fans and paid attention to its rivals. Beenox made a big noise about Manhattan being back (after its relegation in the awful *Spider-Man Edge Of Time*), and swinging through *Spider-Man*'s equivalent of Gotham is a joy. Some will complain about the ease of the swing mechanic (there's no real skill involved beyond timing swings for your own amusement) but this is personal preference: we loved scything through the impressively modelled environment, especially at dusk or during one of the many, massive boss fights.

BETTER THAN

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME



WORSE THAN



BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY





Below: The Web-Rush mechanic is a handy way to get around: simply tap RB to shoot forward to a point near where you're looking at.

So the city is there. The problem is – as we always suspected it would be – filling it with compelling content, and here the game sadly falls short. There is the usual array of random crimes to deal with, side-missions to undertake and even various infected survivors (Manhattan falling prey to a slowly-worsening cross-species outbreak caused by those pesky meddling scientists at Oscorp) to rescue and take to quarantine zones. The problem is that these all play out the same, by and large, not helped by the fact that the game feels very automated.

For example, there are a lot of initially impressive set-pieces that take place at altitude, but these boil down to QTE-fests that look cool but begin to wane after a while. The hand-to-hand combat, while taking a leaf (okay, the whole book) out of the *Arkham* series' counter/strike system, is good but not anywhere near as varied or satisfying as Rocksteady's Freeflow combat system, with the same old moves coming out over and over again. And mission flow is very, very samey. Swing to location. Enter mission. Balance on web to decipher enemy location/beat up force field generator to progress. Repeat to fade/boredom.

These are some of the problems, but not unassailable ones if you're in the right mood. Give yourself over to the spectacle, the automation, accept that it's not the most exciting of experiences as a whole (even if it can *be* exciting) and you've got a *Spider-Man* game that enables you to swing like the man himself and (nearly) fight like Batman. Which, after what's been served up before, is more than good enough for us.

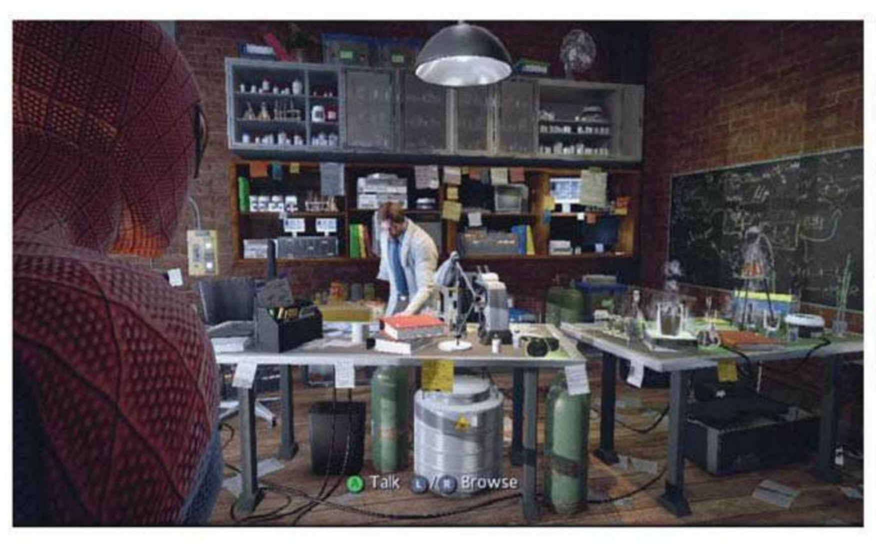
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

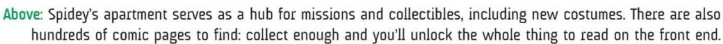
WE BUILT THIS CITY: Beenox's decision to return to Manhattan makes as much sense as ditching it didn't for the last game. It can appear lifeless, but there's no denying the joy of swinging and falling through it.



VERDICT **6**/10
WORTH A SWING BY







Above: Spidey's apartment serves as a hub for missions and collectibles, including new costumes. There are also hundreds of comic pages to find: collect enough and you'll unlock the whole thing to read on the front end.

NOT THE RE-VAMP YOU WANTED

Dawnguard



Above: Gargoyle Brutes are one of the more impressive new enemies, but for those who have already hit a high level through the main game, they fall all too quickly.

It begins so well. Early on in the first DLC outing for *Skyrim*, you learn of a vampire cult that's becoming a big nuisance and the Dawnguard formed to fight it. Towns come under attack from vampires and their demon hounds in events that blur the line between scripted and organic. Not long after you play, you're given the choice of either joining the cult and becoming a vampire yourself or rejecting them and sticking with the Dawnguard.

Teaming up with the mythical creatures is the more interesting option if only because it gives you the choice to transform into a vampire lord at will. This grants you magic and melee modes of attack – magic sees you hovering above the ground (although never flying; it's merely a floating 'run' animation) and casting spells. These begin with drain life and raise dead spells but you can unlock the ability to summon gargoyles, choke pull and so on. The melee form is merely the last resort of a vampire lord who has exhausted all his magic. So far, so good.

However, it's not long before Bethesda's bizarrely short-sighted decisions cripple the experience. The transformation into vampire form takes approximately five seconds of inactivity while you wait for it to load and likewise when reverting back. That would be fine in isolation except you can't pick up items as a vampire lord, and so any desire to scratch the looting itch means you're often forced to switch between the two forms or simply ignore the trinkets dotted around for the sake of speed. Weirder still, Bethesda designed the vampire lord to be a good few feet taller than your normal form and then seemed to forget this when designing the dungeons themselves, with some doorways actually impossible to pass through as a vamp because you're too tall. With no crouch, you're forced to revert back. In short, it's actually a chore managing the two forms – not to mention the menu legwork to select which power to use – and you end up mostly ignoring it. Even the combat becomes tiresome, a war of attrition as you drain life faster than enemies can take it.

Going the other route and fighting the vampires serves up fairly standard *Skyrim* fare, albeit with new items such as crossbows, armoured trolls, Dawnguard armour and the like. It's a hefty chunk of DLC, weighing in at eight hours (double that if you want to replay the vampire mayhem from the alternate side too) yet it never shows the dazzling imagination of *Oblivion*'s Shivering Isles, nor the confidence of *Fallout 3*'s self-contained DLC episodes.

The ability to play as a vampire is clearly the main attraction here, which makes the odd, awkward design surrounding it even more puzzling.

It simply feels like more *Skyrim*. For some people, that in itself might be good enough, however, for this price tag, we should expect a little bit more than simply a mythological being who clunks his forehead against doorframes and cannot pick items up.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Bethesda
DEVELOPER: Bethesda
PRICE: 1600 Microsoft Points
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN



MOTHERSHIP ZETA

WORSE THAN



SHIVERING ISLES

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

VAMPIRE SAVIOUR: Besides the Vampire Lord ability, there are new weapons, spells and such, but most importantly is that there are new areas and reskinned dungeons, making areas feel fresh again.



Below: One of your Vampire Lord abilities is teleporting in a swarm of bats, which is fairly redundant in combat but used for some reach-this-chest style puzzles.





A TOWERING UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT

Babel Rising

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Mando Productions
PRICE: 800 Microsoft Points
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

DOSHIN THE GIANT





WORSE THAN

FROM DUST

***Babel Rising's* biblical theme and top down perspective may call to mind recent XBLA game experiences like the malleable terra-morphing puzzles of *From Dust*, but in actuality this is a game far less flexible than that, and it's not really a game like that in the strictest sense.** You are quite literally playing a deity, casting down malevolent judgement on your tiny lemming-like followers as they attempt to build the titular tower and reach the heavens above, but this is more a game of tower offense than it is *Populous* or indeed *Black & White*.

Your attackers come in long, marching strands, each individual carrying a block of stone that will add to the next section of the ever-rising structure if they reach its uncompleted ramparts. You must stop them from doing so using your powers rooted in the elements of Earth, Wind, Water and Fire. Each element has two basic attacks; the first of which is local and used for smiting small gatherings of workers – an asteroid, for example, or a rain cloud that slows down your encroaching foes – while the second trails behind your cursor for a short amount of time, erecting walls of fire, freezing your blasphemers in their tracks, or cleaving rifts through the ground beneath their feet.

It's an intriguing setup, but one compromised in its implementation. Firstly, there are the familiar issues with Kinect. The implementation of physical and verbal commands is so incredibly poor – often requiring several repetitions of commands before they're recognised – you'll quickly swap to playing with just the pad.

Once you do, more problems arise. There's no system for upgrading or improving your elemental powers; what you see in the first few levels is what you get. Further decreasing variety is the fact that only two elements can be taken into any one level, a restriction that immediately impedes any potential for strategy. Tactics are further undermined by the game's overly aggressive ramping of difficulty. Too often you find yourself frantically whipping around the central axis of the tower, attempting to stem the columns of worker ant-like enemies trailing up and down its sides, but finding the task verging on impossible. It becomes overly chaotic and frenzied too quickly; there's no chance for nuance and tactics to preside over panicked plate spinning.

Level design doesn't help matters much. *Babel Rising's* three acts are incredibly repetitive; objectives are a grind; levels are far too long; and your role quickly boils down to doing little more than watching your power gauges refill and then empty as you release the same attacks over and over.

The end result is a fluffed attempt at the genre that makes you feel anything but omnipotent – more often you feel compromised, hassled and, sooner rather than later, bored.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

ELEMENTAL PROBLEMS: The ability to use all four elements rather than being stuck to the use of just two would have instilled *Babel Rising* with much-needed variety and eased the difficulty curve.



Above: Your primary attacks are bolstered by Ultimate Powers; biblical smart bombs that may cause fire and brimstone to rain down upon your enemy's construction, or floods to raise up and wipe out everything.





Above: Alongside the three-act single-player campaign sits the survival mode, which sees you play without a time limit.



VERDICT 4/10

SHOULD HAVE JUST STUCK WITH IOS

HOW SCI-FI ARE YOU?

Use the SciFiNow flowchart to find out…

START

HAVE YOU SEEN STAR WARS?
- STUPID QUESTION → DID HAN SHOOT FIRST?
- NO → END

DID HAN SHOOT FIRST?
- YES. YES. YES → DO YOU WANT TO BELIEVE?
- NAH. IT WAS GREEDO → IS MEMORABILIA FOR DESKS OR KIDS?

DO YOU WANT TO BELIEVE?
- YES I DO → WOULD YOU PASS A VOIGHT-KAMPFF TEST?
- BELIEVE IN WHAT? → DO THESE MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU: 4,8,15,16, 23,42

WOULD YOU PASS A VOIGHT-KAMPFF TEST?
- NATURALLY → WHAT DOES OCP STAND FOR?
- A WHAT-KAMPFF? → DO YOU KNOW WHAT EXACTLY THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES IS?

IS MEMORABILIA FOR DESKS OR KIDS?
- KIDS → WOULD YOU PREFER AN IPAD OR ZIGGY?
- DESKS → WHAT MAKES TIME TRAVEL POSSIBLE?

WOULD YOU PREFER AN IPAD OR ZIGGY?
- IPAD → NOWHERE NEAR GEEKY ENOUGH. BUT THERE IS HOPE
- ZIGGY → WHAT MAKES TIME TRAVEL POSSIBLE?

DO THESE MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU: 4,8,15,16, 23,42
- LOTTERY PREDICTION? → WHAT MAKES TIME TRAVEL POSSIBLE?
- OF COURSE → UNOBTAINIUM OR ADAMANTIUM?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT EXACTLY THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES IS?
- THEY SMELL A BIT? → HOW DO YOU MAKE A SOYLENT GREEN?
- SURE → DO YOU PLAY WITH YOUR MASHED POTATO?

WHAT DOES OCP STAND FOR?
- HAVEN'T A CLUE → DO YOU PLAY WITH YOUR MASHED POTATO?
- OMNI CONSUMER PRODUCTS → HOW DO YOU SPELL 'RECALL'?

WHAT MAKES TIME TRAVEL POSSIBLE?
- FLUX CAPACITOR → UNOBTAINIUM OR ADAMANTIUM?
- NOTHING → SOMEWHERE INSIDE YOU IS A NERD TRYING TO GET OUT

UNOBTAINIUM OR ADAMANTIUM?
- ADAMANTIUM → WHO IS HAL JORDAN?
- UNOBTAINIUM → WHAT DOES V STAND FOR?

DO YOU PLAY WITH YOUR MASHED POTATO?
- NEVER → HOW DO YOU MAKE A SOYLENT GREEN?
- YEP → WHERE IS BABYLON 4?

HOW DO YOU SPELL 'RECALL'?
- LIKE THAT → WHERE IS BABYLON 4?
- NOT LIKE THAT → WHAT CLASS OF PLANET IS VULCAN?

WHAT DOES V STAND FOR?
- VIMTO → SOMEWHERE INSIDE YOU IS A NERD TRYING TO GET OUT
- VISITORS. OR VENDETTA. WHICHEVER → THE FORCE IS WITH YOU. BUT YOU MUST TRAIN HARDER

WHO IS HAL JORDAN?
- NO IDEA → WHAT DOES V STAND FOR?
- EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT… → FANCY A TRIP ON THE NOSTROMO?

HOW DO YOU MAKE A SOYLENT GREEN?
- WITH PEOPLE → WHERE IS BABYLON 4?
- PAINT IT? → FANCY A TRIP ON THE NOSTROMO?

WHERE IS BABYLON 4?
- DUNNO → DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE CULTURE IS?
- LOST IN TIME → WHAT CLASS OF PLANET IS VULCAN?

FANCY A TRIP ON THE NOSTROMO?
- ARE YOU MENTAL? → WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN ON 27 AUGUST 1997?
- ISN'T THAT A VAMPIRE? → SOMEWHERE INSIDE YOU IS A NERD TRYING TO GET OUT

WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN ON 27 AUGUST 1997?
- A PARTY? → THE FORCE IS WITH YOU. BUT YOU MUST TRAIN HARDER
- JUDGMENT DAY → CAN YOU NAME THE FIVE?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE CULTURE IS?
- SUNDAY TIMES SUPPLEMENT? → WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN ON 27 AUGUST 1997?
- YES → CAN YOU NAME THE FIVE?

WHAT CLASS OF PLANET IS VULCAN?
- UPPER? → DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE CULTURE IS?
- M → CAN YOU NAME THE FIVE?

CAN YOU NAME THE FIVE?
- SURE CAN'T → IMPRESSIVE. YOUR SCI-FI KNOWLEDGE IS PRETTY AMAZING
- SURE CAN → WE BOW DOWN TO YOU, MASTER OF ALL GEEKDOM

Results:
- NOWHERE NEAR GEEKY ENOUGH. BUT THERE IS HOPE
- SOMEWHERE INSIDE YOU IS A NERD TRYING TO GET OUT
- THE FORCE IS WITH YOU. BUT YOU MUST TRAIN HARDER
- IMPRESSIVE. YOUR SCI-FI KNOWLEDGE IS PRETTY AMAZING
- WE BOW DOWN TO YOU, MASTER OF ALL GEEKDOM

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FROM SOFTWARE SCRAMBLES AROUND FOR HARDCORE KINECT VIABILITY

Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: From Software
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN
BLACKWATER



WORSE THAN
THE GUNSTRINGER

The year is 2082, and a silicon-eating microbe has chewed its way through all microprocessors, an event referred to as the 'datacide', leaving only clunky, chugging, unpredictable technology in its wake.

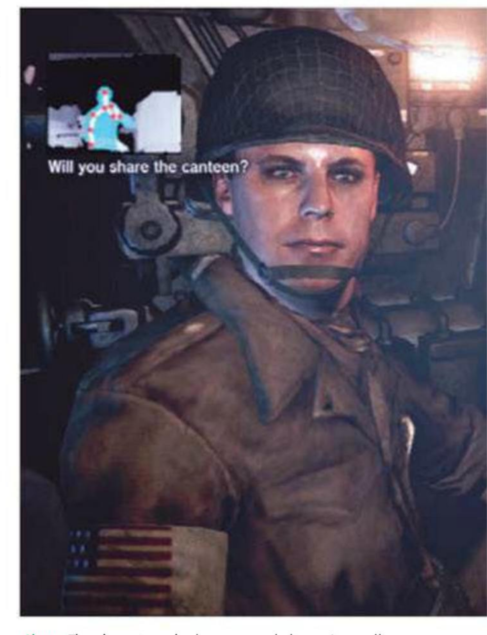
As such, in this *Steel Battalion* the mechs aren't iPods but more like VHS machines. They're plodding M4 Shermans on legs; cramped, sweaty and claustrophobic, pocked with blast holes and held together with spit and scotch tape. You're sat in the belly of such a cantankerous old tin can, surrounded by a bank of knobs, levers and buttons that require your attention if you are to win the ongoing struggle against an evil Chinese-led UN.

Famously, the original *Steel Battalion* required players to control the action on screen with a physical facsimile of such a cockpit; an overtly complicated 40-button beast of a peripheral. Here, however, although a pad is used for moving and firing the less basic abilities of the retrofuturist machine, your piloting is controlled with something far more technologically advanced – Kinect. Rather than pushing or prodding actual buttons you're stretching out into the air to pull levers that whir your M7 Swift into action; reaching up to pull down a periscope; pulling out consoles; flipping switches. The only problem is, in the heat of battle, it simply doesn't work.

If Capcom hoped to create the feeling of being awkward, cramped, irritated, stuck, and fighting against inevitable odds with hopeless technology, then it is to be congratulated for a commendable job by having *Heavy Armor* controlled with Kinect. It is the clunkiest adoption of the motion-control hardware yet, so much so it essentially cripples the game.

Early on in the game you'll catch apples, take gum from a fellow soldier, and punch another for insubordination, but even these supposedly simple actions initially feel sticky and unsure, as if Kinect isn't completely certain that the player repeatedly waving their hands towards it is an indication that yes, they do actually want to take that stick of gum.

When you're in the thick of combat, these issues escalate from niggles into near game-breaking flaws. Even the most necessary and frequent of the actions that players must perform is poorly implemented: stick two arms out



Above: The characters sharing your cockpit aren't usually happy to be there, often screaming for their safety. It's a refreshing change from the gung-ho heroics game characters usually in this situation, but can get annoying.

Below: Occasionally throughout the campaign you'll encounter missions that have you fighting alongside other VTs, which can be piloted by friends over Xbox Live if you so wish. These action-heavy missions are score-based and will see you earn better gear for your VT, which can then be customised in the main menu.

THESE MECHS ARE PLODDING M4 SHERMANS ON LEGS; CRAMPED, SWEATY AND CLAUSTROPHOBIC, POCKED WITH BLAST HOLES SCOTCH TAPE

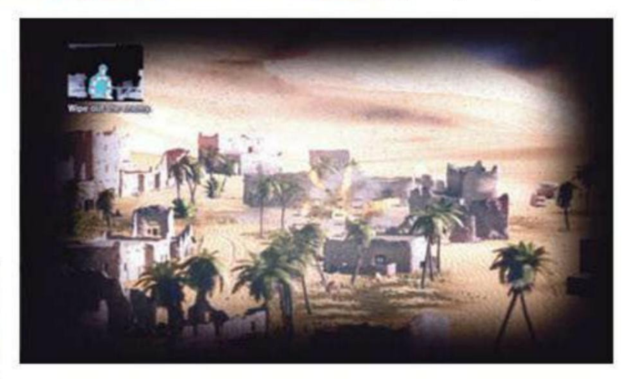
FAQs

Q. IS THIS AN FPS?
Ostensibly, but a cramped one. The viewport window's tiny. If it smashes you have to close a shutter lest a stray bullet makes it through into the cockpit.

Q. HOW DO YOU SEE THEN?
You could use the black and white monitor to your side, but that's utterly useless.

Q. SO THE PERISCOPE'S THE BEST BET?
Yes, until that smashes too. To be honest, the whole experience can become rather irritating.

Below: The missions may be short, but the repeated, unfair deaths will ensure you're stuck on each long enough to make them feel like they're dragging on longer than they should.



TAKING MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS

Although the cockpit controls are activated using Kinect, the movement and weapons of your VT are controlled using a regular Xbox pad. Movement itself is slow and plodding, with turning usually requiring a full stop. You could pull the left lever in your cockpit to activate a short sprint, but the repeated efforts it takes to do so for what amounts to an ineffectual jog across the terrain means it's better left ignored. Combat, meanwhile, is similarly slow, but powerful; encounters with enemy VTs are tense exchanges of cannon fire, and during these moments *Heavy Armor* almost threatens to be satisfying. However, it's rarely long before whatever good they do is forgotten as the game forces you to once again deal with Kinect.

towards the screen and your character, famed US 'veet' pilot Winfield Powers, should lean forward and peer out the tiny viewport, giving players a proper first-person view of surroundings. However, fifty per cent of the time Winfield will choose to close the viewport hatch instead, or hit one of the ammunition-swapping buttons on the dashboard, or even just ignore your actions completely. If he does finally move into position he'll often simply sit back in his seat the second you retract your arms. Bearing in mind that while you're struggling to have the game obey this simplest of commands, you're being constantly bombarded by fire from enemy troops, the whole chassis of your VT shaking, wobbling, and generally making the whole process interminably far more irritating.

Another problem: if a VT takes too many shells, the cockpit will often fill up with smoke, requiring the player to vent it before Winfield and his co-pilots suffocate. To do this, players must reach to the right and, with a slow inwards arc of their arm, pull out a panel located on the right-hand side of the screen. On that panel they must then pick out and pull a chord that powers up the ventilator.

Not just once or twice, but consistently throughout the game this becomes an all-too-familiar process of accidentally turning too far right in the cockpit, flicking on the headlights, leaning forward into the viewport, and generally doing everything you don't want to do until you've taken too long and suffocated to death, failing the level once again.

The level of difficulty is too high, not because of any question of skill, but because Kinect constantly reads your actions incorrectly, attempting to pull, push or prod some mechanism you had no intention of using. Considering that the action is so slow and deliberate, one missed action can mean taking an often-fatal shell directly to the face.

It's a pity, as there was definitely potential somewhere within this botched experiment. Controlling a mech not just from a first-person perspective but also from the inside of the cockpit itself is a genuinely intriguing idea. This is a mech game concerned as much with what's going on within that lumbering hunk of metal as outside of it. Shared with a comms officer and two loaders, you're constantly surrounded with personalities who will interact with you throughout the game; you might have to save a crewmember from a knife attack, pull a shard of metal from their abdomen, or even reach over a corpse to manually load a weapon if they're no longer capable of doing so.

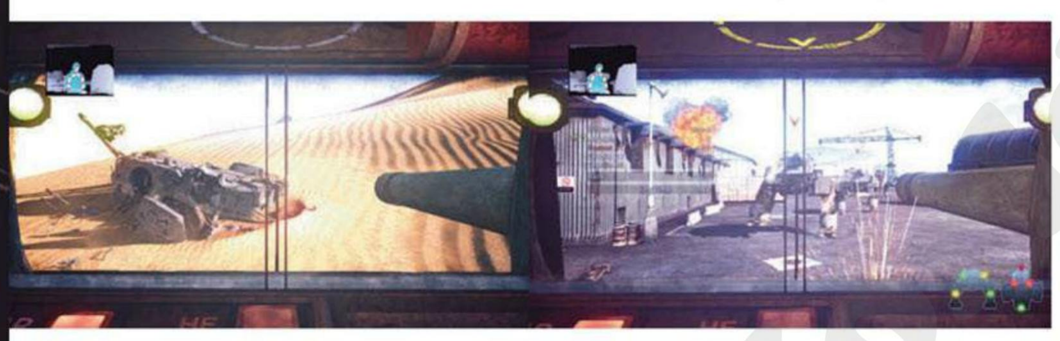
From's attempt to create a large cast of characters with their own identifiable personalities – described in brief bios during the loading screens and somewhat reflected in the nature of the characters when they're sat next to you – is commendable, but a poor script and ignorable dialogue renders From's efforts moot. They spend most of their time wailing or barking frightened questions, asking "what the hell do you think you're doing?" Good question. The vague mission objectives often leave you scrambling around not just inside the cockpit but also on the map, wondering just exactly where it is you're meant to go and what you're supposed to be doing. As such, missions are irksome repetitions of trial and error rather than steadily building exercise in excitement. You'll play levels over and over until you learn the locations of the enemies, stay far back, and shoot first.

All this from the game that was supposedly going to solidify Kinect as a worthwhile proposition for the hardcore crowd. After all, *Child Of Eden* might have been too airy-fairy for some, but you don't get much more hardcore than mechs. However, what *Heavy Armor* does is the exact opposite. It highlights Kinect's flaws rather than showcases its strengths, sending out one, clear, reverberating message: Kinect simply isn't refined enough to unite the hardware with the hardcore.

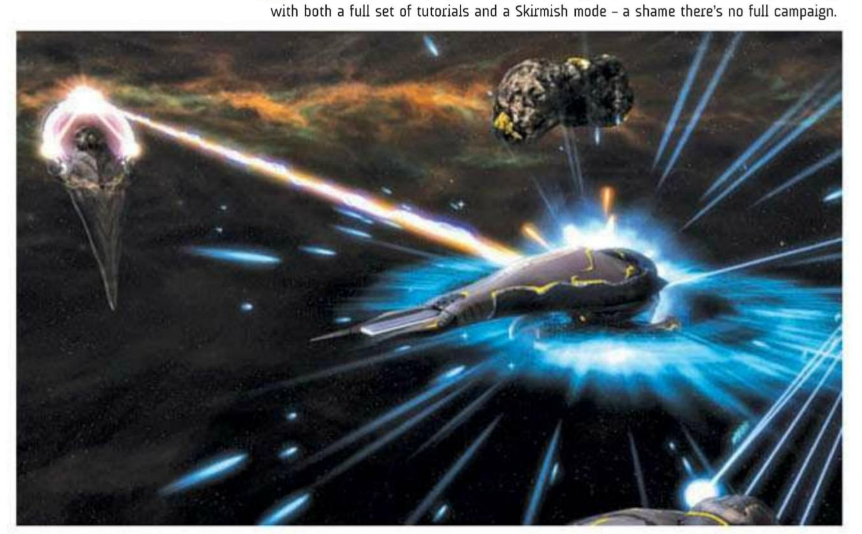
MISSING LINK
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

HANDS RESTRICTED – We would get rid of Kinect. We can only imagine how things could have been if From Software had created this whole thing on pad only, Wii U, or, dare we say it, a 40 button peripheral…

VERDICT 3/10
A 40-BUTTON CONTROLLER WOULD HAVE BEEN PREFERABLE



Below: *Rebellion* provides players with plenty of opportunities to master its deep RTS play, with both a full set of tutorials and a Skirmish mode – a shame there's no full campaign.





EPIC BUT STILL LIMITED IN SCOPE

Sins of a Solar Empire: Rebellion

Idle hands, they say, are the devil's playthings. If that's true then anyone who plays *Sins of a Solar Empire: Rebellion* will be among the most virtuous of all gamers – simply because from the moment they jump into Ironclad Games' new expansion to its epic space RTS they'll be too busy managing their economies and fleets to do anything else – and in the heart of battle that sometimes includes think.

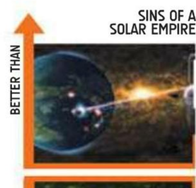
While the *Sins of a Solar Empire* games don't sport the finely tuned RTS play or pure immediacy of a *StarCraft II* or the more complex micro-level nuanced management of games like *Civilization V*, their blend of RTS combat and world management has always occupied a comfortable middle ground. Just as importantly, their approach as you zoom in and out of their fully 3D space environment, building and battling with your Empire's space fleets, is visually impressive and totally demanding. *Rebellion* builds upon that with new units and a fair degree of polish, so whether you're a novice or an old fan you'll find plenty to keep you occupied. Curious newbies will be captivated by learning to juggle the intricacies of resource and economic management while directing fleets into battle, while hoary veterans do all of that instinctively but still find themselves deeply occupied on the micro level, focusing on effectively using their starships' weapons systems or creating fleets of new units like Corvettes or impressively powerful Titans in the fastest time scales in order to obliterate opponents. But don't let all this talk of *management* fool you – there's a real thrill to *Rebellion*'s real-time battles, especially when you zoom in to watch the often impressive visual cacophony of lasers as droves of spaceships broadside each other, or master the intricacies of its RTS rock-paper-scissors mechanics and use them to whip other players right back to their home worlds and bombard them.

Because *Rebellion* is a multiplayer-only offering (there's no campaign) and balance is paramount, Ironclad has really just divided the original game's three factions – TEC (human), Advent (techno-human) and Vasari (alien) – into Loyalist and Rebel strands in Rebellion. However, each of these comes with its own variations of tech trees and play styles that correspond to its ethos. That said, the lack of a campaign means all that doesn't quite carry the weight it might otherwise have and while *Rebellion*'s high-quality tutorials are a pleasant surprise, few things please true RTS fans more than a smart campaign: newbies will be forced to master *Rebellion*'s nuances in Skirmish mode before throwing themselves to the online wolves. That failing largely outweighs the fact that you do get all the gameplay additions from *Sins*' other expansions, with units like Starbases and various victory conditions, and while this is the best multiplayer version of *Sins*, it feels a touch thin compared to what it could potentially have been – more like a very generous multiplayer patch than a full expansion in many ways. We'd have simply hoped for more from a franchise that is so grandiose in every other respect.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Stardock
DEVELOPER: Ironclad Entertainment/Iron Lore
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 8
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows Vista SP2, 2.2GHz CPU, 256MB video card with Pixel Shader 3.0 Support
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN: SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE





WORSE THAN: STARCRAFT II

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

STORY TIME: Rebellion advances the *Sins* fiction in interesting ways, and allows for several enjoyable gameplay additions, but the lack of a campaign gives it too little context and makes them mere mechanics









VERDICT 6/10

ENJOYABLE FAN SERVICE BUT STRETCHED TOO THIN

FATSHARK ATTEMPTS TO TAKE THE ARPG IN BRAVE NEW DIRECTIONS

Krater: Shadows Over Solside

Right: A big deal has been made about *Krater*'s crafting, as you can essentially create anything. Unfortunately, as with a lot of the items you pick up, there's very often little of value to actually craft. A pity, because the dropped loot really is pitiful.

It's a brave, or possibly foolhardy developer who releases an action RPG at the moment. It's an even braver one that chooses to thrash out new ideas that aren't atypical to the norm and attempts to strike off the well-trodden path and blaze their own trail. What a pity then that Fatshark's new game tries so hard to deliver something that's fresh and new, yet delivers a distinctly average product.

Things start off promisingly enough, mainly because the world of *Krater* really does deserve a visit. Set in a quirky post-apocalyptic Sweden, it's littered with humorous tongue-in-cheek jokes about the country, and is populated with all manner of interesting NPCs, more so since its recent patches.

Art-wise it riffs heavily on Gearbox's Borderlands with the world's occupants wearing heavy facemasks and similar rag-tag clothing. Despite similarities to Gearbox's game, there are enough differences in the well-defined towns and gorgeously detailed world map to give *Krater* its own unique sense of identity. Dungeons, however, are less well-defined, often looking samey and having few distinct or defining landmarks, but the dappled forests and open farmland that you visit do make up for those dull layouts.

It's not just *Krater*'s colourful world that sets it apart from other ARPGs; its core gameplay is also distinctly different. Not better, you understand, but certainly different. Unlike other games within the genre, *Krater* sees you controlling a squad of three distinct characters from four different classes (see boxout). This motley crew of miscreants can be handled by either switching between them and controlling them individually on the fly using the Q, W, and E buttons, or playing with them as a team by dragging your cursor over them RTS style. It's an interesting addition to the genre, but is let down by average AI that rarely lets you approach combat in the way that Fatshark obviously wants you to; mainly because you simply can't trust your computer-controlled team mates to give you suitable support.

Another interesting idea is that your team has a self-imposed level cap, persuading you to recruit stronger characters whenever you visit a new area (typically towns). If these new characters had widely differing skills and abilities to the four classes that are available, it could have been quite a clever touch, with the player being forced to change teams for whatever new quest they were due to tackle next. Unfortunately, they're exactly the same as the ones you already have, meaning that your existing team becomes instantly disposable and you have to throw away all the hard work it took to level them up. Fatshark has since added the ability to bypass this peculiar quirk by visiting a boot camp, but you need such an extortionate amount of cash that you're unlikely to be able to benefit from it anyway.

To make matters worse any new characters you do hire start off with zero experience,

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Fatshark
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows Vista/ Windows 7, Dual Core 2.4 GHz processor, 2GB RAM, 5 GB HD space, Shader 4.0 compatible graphics card, DirectX11
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Above: We've often had encounters where additional enemies lie just out of wait, patiently waiting their turn, despite being scant feet from a fight.



Right: The world map looks incredible, begging you to explore its fertile-looking landscape. What a pity then that it's painfully slow to trudge around, and filled with incredibly brutal encounters. The inability to save at any time makes your journey an even more dangerous one.

MOOSEY MOUND

THERE'S A WEIRD CHARM TO KRATER THAT MAKES YOU CONTINUALLY RETURN TO IT DESPITE ALL ITS INHERENT FLAWS





FAQs

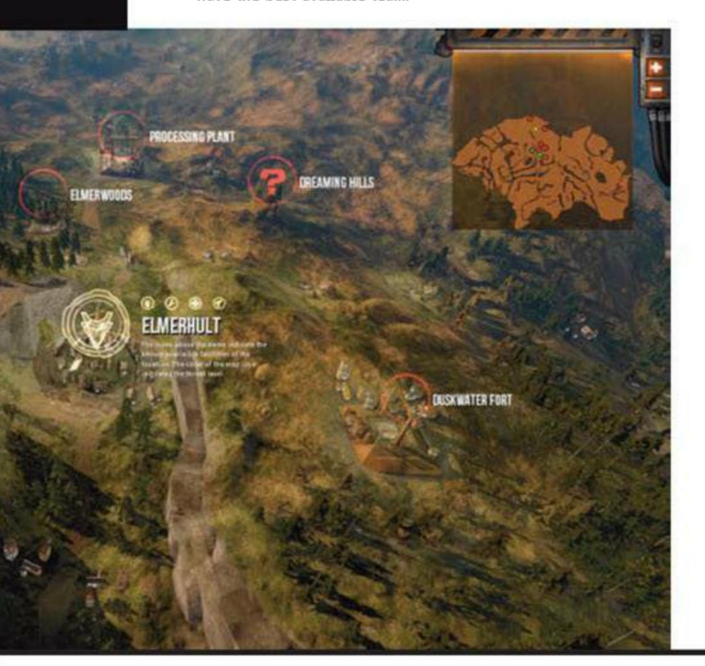
Q. SO WHAT'S THE LEVEL-CAP?
It's actually very low, with characters currently maxing out at level 15. That still requires plenty of grinding though.

Q. IS IT LIKE DIABLO THEN?
Not really, which is why we've not mentioned it in our review. They share the same DNA, but are constructed quite differently.

Q. WHERE'S THE MULTIPLAYER?
Fatshark is keen to implement it and hoping to have it out by the time you read this.

MEET THE TEAM

There are four distinct types of playable characters that can be hired in *Krater*, and they're also extremely similar to existing archetypes within the genre. Bruisers are your tanks. Slow and lumbering, they can soak up damage and also dish it out, while the Medikus is the team's healer. He's weak in combat, but keep him at a distance and he can constantly top up the health bars of his friends. The Regulator is a *Krater*'s marksman, excelling at long distance combat, but being fairly weak in a toe-to-toe fight. The final available class is the Slayer who benefits from speed and excels in melee combat. With only three characters available at any one time, care must be taken to ensure you always have the best available team.



meaning you have to waste time getting them to the level you're already at, only to then progress them to a suitable level for your current mission. Couple in the fact that the many character-enhancing boosters and implants you upgrade your heroes with aren't transferable and you'll find that *Krater* descends into one long grind fest. This in itself would almost be okay if *Krater*'s combat was enjoyable, but the tool sets that each character has access to are extremely slim, with a paltry amount of skills to choose from. Granted there are additional enhancements that can be purchased or found, but these do nothing more than enhance your existing abilities, meaning the combat never evolves into anything remotely interesting at all.

Death is also an interesting concept that again is handled in an extremely baffling way. Whenever a character dies (and they will, because there's no decent indication of the enemies you fight until you enter battle with them) they can accrue more serious injuries like broken limbs. Get too many permanent injuries and your characters will die, which would be fine if the self-imposed level caps didn't make this whole exercise pointless. It's hard to care about a character's death when you can simply recruit a better one. There's a knock-on effect as well, as it becomes incredibly hard to care about *Krater*'s story, as there's no sense of caring for your characters. In fact your starting characters are unlikely to even reach *Krater*'s conclusion, making things seem even more pointless.

And yet there's a weird charm to *Krater* that makes you continually return to it despite all its inherent flaws. Brutal difficulty spikes, the inability to automatically walk over to distant loot when you click on it (clicking on NPCs works fine though) not being able to see what loot is until you actually pick it up all annoy and feel antiquated. Then there's the amazingly messy inventory screen, the fact that you rarely pick up loot that's worth anywhere near the power of the enemies you just defeated, never knowing when you've picked up something of worth, the lack of handy save points in dungeons, which means you're constantly back-tracking through empty levels and dungeons, re-fogging when you return to them – the list of annoying issues just goes on and on.

We continue to stick with it though, because Fatshark's patch support has been second to none, delivering a service that really shows they care about the ambitious world they're trying to create. Ultimately though, all the patches in the world, no matter how commendable, can't hide the fact that *Krater*'s core gameplay mechanics are as flawed as its setting is beautiful, and that really does sadden us.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BRAVE NEW WORLD: We like *Krater* because it's brimming with new ideas and possibilities and wants to move away from the standard ARPG template. It's just too ambitious for its own good.

VERDICT 5/10
BRIMMING WITH IDEAS THAT ARE POORLY EXECUTED

BLOCKY HORROR SHOW

Home

In the cash-fuelled dreams of sharp-suited industry execs, games aren't just confined to the disc they arrive on. They're everywhere – in their own spin-off comic series, in their Facebook pages and character-driven Twitter feeds, in their lunch boxes, and on their t-shirts and foam weapons, desperate to drain a few more bucks from hungry, online-pass paying punters. So how is it, then, that *Home*, an independent horror game from the mind and hands of one man in Canada, has managed to create more of a cross-media buzz than any Triple-A juggernaut you care to think of?

Just go to homehorror.com/whathappened (actually don't, until you've finished the game) and you'll find reams of quotes from players detailing their experiences and theories about the game. Check out @homehorror for a feed from the game's protagonist that stretches months. These things exist to add colour and excitement to the game's world, not squeeze more money out of it. And considering that the game is an hour-long, pixel-art murder mystery, it's some achievement.

Home may look like that other recent blocky horror, *Lone Survivor*, but Ben Rivers' piece actually has much more in common with traditional adventure games. Even text adventures. You wake up in a funny house with no memory of how you got there, and are equipped with a low-powered flashlight and a gammy leg. The gameplay is beyond simple – arrow keys to move and Spacebar to interact – and anything that requires your attention is highlighted in white.

Within seconds of waking, you stumble across a dead body; brutally murdered, it seems. From there, the story adds layers of intrigue and suspense, asking as many questions as it answers as you try to make your way back home. To spoil any more of the story would be criminal itself, as this

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Self Published
DEVELOPER: Ben Rivers
PRICE: £1.69
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Right: *Home* delivers mystery and suspense without ever delving into the surreal – rare for a horror game.



FAQs

Q. HOW DO I GET IT?
Pop along to **homehorror.com.**

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Not much more than an hour, but multiple play throughs are an absolute must.

Q. WHO IS THIS BEN RIVERS?
Another very exciting developer working off his own steam.

AS YOU PIECE TOGETHER THE NARRATIVE, THE GAME MANAGES TO CHILL, CONFUSE AND PERTURB SURPRISINGLY WELL





Left: The visuals aren't great, but the pixel-art is stylish and the atmosphere thick. Rivers has created a world that feels lived-in and real without the need for expensive assets and minute detail.



is a game almost entirely about narrative. Know that it's worth paying attention to even inconsequential details, however, where Japanese and Japanese-inspired horror likes to deal in sub text, *Home* is much more of a straight story, albeit one where the pieces don't quite fit together. Instead of working out what the writer is trying to say, though, it's actually about working out what the hell is going on, and as you piece together the narrative, the game manages to chill, confuse and perturb surprisingly well.

It helps that Rivers has proven himself a master of audio, creating a subtle, synth-driven soundscape that owes a debt to Akira Yamoaka (what doesn't in horror these days) but without ever resorting to his deafening industrial racket. Disconnected sound effects and aural non-sequiturs round out the soundtrack, forging a thick atmosphere that allies that sparsity of the visuals.

Where *Home* does suffer, though, is in its relative lack of gameplay ambition. Its length is a non-issue (it's short but both inexpensive and perfectly-formed, narratively) but it does veer dangerously close to the 'walking-game' genre, the barely-interactive movement that places story well above gameplay. There are puzzles of sorts, but not ones that require any real thought, and some light key-and-door head scratchers, but it is tough to escape the feeling that you're not really doing that much. In fact, it's only on a second play through (basically a requirement, and you'll see why for yourself when you finish the game) that *Home's* really clever ideas take shape. While there's a really obvious A/B choice late on in the game, it turns out that small, seemingly pointless interactions and objects have vast repercussions, actually changing both the game world and the story. With two play throughs, it's entirely possible to experience two completely conflicting narratives, even if you make the same binary choice late on. Effectively, you entirely shape the game that you're playing.

It's quite an achievement, and one that could go unnoticed were it not for the eager and excitable world Rivers has crafted around his game. Reading through the testimonials on the aforementioned 'what happened' section of the site is both a fascinating insight into the personalities of those who have enjoyed the game, but also a raft of reasons to stick it back on and play again.

How rare is it for a game to elicit that sort of discussion? *Mass Effect 3* managed it, but that took millions of dollars and three 30-hour-plus instalments. Rivers has achieved it in an hour. Partly through his craft, and partly because the audience is that much more engaged. It seems to be much easier to create a positive and involved community when the ugly side of the game's business is nowhere to be seen.

It's also why Rivers deserves as big an audience as possible for his work. An iOS version is a must, really, given how well it would work on both phone and tablet. Hopefully then, Rivers will see sense and add a save function, too, which is currently not included for 'artistic' reasons. Not having separate save files is one thing, but forcing a restart on a player who just wants to take a break is bordering on arrogance. Also, a couple of proofing errors need to be sorted out during the later stages of the game.

As it is, though, *Home* is a must play. Its brevity matches its ambition – it's a game everyone should play, if only to see what's possible with a creative vision and stringent commitment to atmosphere. It's not the scariest, the smartest or the most ambitious game you'll ever experience, but it's also one you're very unlikely to regret.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

TALK TALK: Home's connected gameplay takes place in an unusual space: outside the game. Go on Twitter or the game's website to get involved with discussions and see the game in different ways.

VERDICT 8/10
INTRIGUING, INTERESTING AND WELL-WORTH INVESTIGATING



Left: There's no save function, and quitting will erase all your progress. Thankfully version 1.2 allows you to play in a window.



SQUARE SCARES

Home isn't the only pixel-art horror game to appear in recent months. Jasper Byrne's spectacularly haunting *Lone Survivor* is also a must-have for gamers craving a few genuine chills. In an industry where mainstream horror games seem determined to turn themselves into cover-shooters, it's great and important that creators are still finding the ways and means to scare us witless. Also, games like these two demonstrate that horror doesn't require big budgets or thousands of art assets, just a calculated, measured atmosphere, some economical writing and a great deal of mystery. Let's hope these two lead the way for a new surge of videogaming horror.

CREATING YOUR OWN BUDGET AIRLINE HAS NEVER BEEN SUCH A SIMPLE TASK

Pocket Planes

Such was the success of *Tiny Tower*, developer NimbleBit really had no choice but to release a follow-up title, and it has come in the form of *Pocket Planes*. In much the same way as the skyscraper building sim took inspiration from titles like *SimTower* and *Corporation Inc*, *Pocket Planes* is built around the idea of taking a concept that already exists – that of airline management – and giving it a new direction. The pixel art charm that made *Tiny Tower* such an accessible game is still present, as is the casual play experience that allows you to pick up and drop the game as you wish, an obvious positive for a mobile title.

The basic principle of the game is to gradually build up your airline and its fleet of commercial planes by ferrying passengers and various pieces of cargo between several destinations. Each journey earns you coins, which can then be reinvested in new aircraft, upgrades and unlocking new airports. The physical gameplay is very thin on the ground: tap your choice of cargo, destination and then come back when you are notified the flight is complete.

The draw of *Pocket Planes* lies in the depth of upgrades and features that are hidden in plain sight. Go through the in-game menu and you will find a market selling upgrade parts as well as a flight log full of stats.

The game is also very good at rewarding patience, with the in-flight animation of an individual plane often being peppered with extra coins flying by that can be grabbed and added to your total. As your destination net widens, strategy also comes into play, as you choose cargo and passengers that are worth the trip, and within your plane's range.

Where NimbleBit has also hit the mark is with the way this freemium game is layered. You have the option to buy extra currency and speed up your airline's growth, but unlike other freemium titles, *Pocket Planes* doesn't wait until you are hooked and then insist on investment. You can happily play forever for free, and not miss out on a thing in terms of gameplay.

The game itself feels very lively and is brimming with personality – the faux social network from *Tiny Tower* is still here, allowing users to track the emotions of their various 'bitizen' passengers. The same can also be said of the interface, with the map view showing you just how much potential growth there is in the game – you can in theory fly to every major city in the world.

The cleverness of *Pocket Planes* lies in its simple nature, you can play for five minutes and then walk away. Yet having dispatched all your flights you know it will only be moments before they are all ready to go again, and that nagging thought will keep you coming back.

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: NimbleBit
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: Free
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FLIGHT CREW: Join a Flight Crew made up of global users, where jobs completed by each individual member are added to a shared total. Top the global leaderboard to earn prizes for your team.

VERDICT 6/10

A STEP UP FROM TINY TOWER DUE TO ADDED DEPTH

Left: The overview allows you to see not only the current position of all of your planes, but also helps you to plan routes.











PSP COMES BACK FOR ONE MORE TURN

Gungnir

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Atlus
DEVELOPER: Sting
PRICE: $29.99
RELEASE: Japan: 19.5.11
US: 12.06.12
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



While the PSP may be perilously close to shuffling off its mortal coil and passing gracefully into the Great Console Heaven in the sky, it's not quite ready to breathe its last just yet. Proof that the system still has some juice left in the tank comes in the shape of yet another tactical RPG, this time from publisher Atlus and developer Sting, the latter of which has carved out a respectable niche thanks to previous efforts such as *Riviera*, *Knights In The Nightmare* and *Yggdra Union*.

Gungnir occupies the same universe as those aforementioned titles, but is only very loosely connected and doesn't require you to have played any other Sting RPGs in order to fully grasp the storyline. Speaking of which, the game is populated by the usual role-playing clichés; an evil empire, a band of downtrodden but valiant rebels and a young, dashing lead character who has to deal with his fair share of heartbreak during the course of the quest.

Sting is a developer that has gained a reputation for innovation within the genre, and previous outings have skilfully fused different gameplay styles to create wholly unique pieces of software. *Gungnir* bucks this trend to a certain degree; for the most part it adheres fairly slavishly to the tried-and-tested tactical RPG blueprint laid down by genre classics such as *Tactics Ogre* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

It does possess some ideas of its own, such as the 'Tactics Gauge' system which makes the game less turn-based and more timer-based. Other welcome touches include special co-operative support moves in the form of 'Boost' and 'Beat' attacks, and the ability to occupy special bases on the map and thereby switch your equipment mid-battle. All of this is wrapped up in some very agreeable window-dressing, with gorgeous hand-drawn visuals and suitably epic music.

Where the game is slightly less successful is in its overall balance. It feels slightly skewed in favour of tough, tank-like warriors, and before long you'll find that battles become needlessly elongated as both sides pit their most robust fighters against one another, liberally dishing out healing potions in an effort to gain the upper hand.

Other issues – such as missions which are impossible to win (yet give no indication that this is case), the lack of a mid-battle save system and some tortuously drawn-out dialogue sequences – further erode *Gungnir*'s long-term appeal. The irony is that by trying to create a more conventional tactical RPG, Sting has inadvertently diluted the very essence which imbues its efforts with such a unique and appealing quality.

Truly dedicated fans of the genre will no doubt have the fortitude to push past the problems and grasp the experience with both hands, but there are better examples of tactical RPGs on the PSP. Make sure you've tried those first before contemplating this effort.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

BALANCING ACT: *Gungnir* places too much emphasis on tank-type fighters; we'd address that.
SAVE ME: You can't save mid-battle, which seems downright silly on a portable device.

Above: Although some scenes drag on for far too long, the script is surprisingly well-written, mixing in equal parts humour and drama.





Above: *Gungnir*'s on-screen UI is often a cluttered mishmash of confusing data, which makes it hard to keep up with the battle action.

VERDICT 6/10

A FLAWED YET MODERATELY INTRIGUING TACTICAL ROLE-PLAYER

Below: Slowing down time enables you to cross objects suspended in mid-air to reach new platforms. Trickier when you have to throw said object first, before switching dimensions.





STEP INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION

Quantum Conundrum

The long shadow cast by Valve's *Portal* over *Quantum Conundrum* almost threatens to suffocate Kim Swift's latest invention. Drawing comparisons between the two is unfortunately unavoidable – they share a markedly similar DNA (environmental puzzles, weighted cubes, and an unseen commentator). But whereas *Portal*'s out-of-nowhere arrival, sinister AI and clandestine bunker of tricks inspired awe, *Conundrum*'s vibrant puzzle mansion falls short of establishing its own identity.

Conundrum's version of the Portal Gun is an Interdimensional Shift Device (ISD); a glove that enables dimensional hopping that transforms the laws of physics in the world around you into one of four alternative guises. There's a gentle (and arguably overly drawn-out) introduction to this conceit: the Fluffy dimension (a sort of fabric-commercial-cum-heaven utopia) wherein all objects become light enough to pick-up is the first to be introduced, shortly followed by the Heavy dimension, and the ability to not only increase the weight of items, but also transform the environment into what looks like a rusty toolshed.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Airtight Games
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows XP, Intel Core 2 Duo 2.2 Ghz or AMD Athlon x2 64 3800+, 2 GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT 512 MB or ATI Radeon HD 2900 512 MB
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

NARBACULAR DROP



JUST LIKE



PORTAL 2

Once the game breaks from this serviceable introduction, there's an astonishing amount of depth to the puzzles. While it's not as tightly constructed as *Portal*'s intense chambers, the trade-off is that there's a heightened sense of freedom to just experiment. For instance, why use one of the provided Not-Companion Cubes to leap across a fissure (throwing it in the Fluffy world before quickly switching to a time-slowing dimension and then jumping aboard) when there's a massive sofa you could use? Brace yourself: conventional thinking is a lie.

As the complexity of puzzle design increases, so too does a gratifying sense of accomplishment. *Portal* mastered the deft balance between challenge and reward, and *Quantum Conundrum* settles into a similarly galvanizing pace. Of course, expect rooms where a particularly perplexing puzzle halts progress momentarily, but the time spent discovering a solution only sweetens the eventual satisfaction (you'll feel like your IQ has leapt about thirty points in as many minutes).

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NEW DIMENSION: *Quantum Conundrum* enables players to toy with the laws of physics and jump between four distinct dimensions to solve a series of puzzles.

Outside of the meticulously crafted puzzles, the surrounding story is vacant of imagination. Lost in his uncle's colourful mansion, the twelve-year-old hero wanders through indistinguishable hallways without a sense of purpose or progression. Without the promise of a new puzzle, there's little to compel players to venture down the next recycled corridor.

Most disappointing of all, as hard as it tries (and it sure does try), it's just not funny. The uncle in question – providing commentary while lost in limbo – reels off various puns, heavy-handed remarks and a seemingly endless amount of woeful observations, all of which feel laboured almost immediately. In the mad scientist uncle, *Conundrum* finds the antithesis of GLaDOS but none of the charm. With a sharper wit to match the sophistication of the puzzle design, this jaunty adventure could have been a new dimension. As it stands, it's just a little too familiar to one we've visited before.

Right: Lateral thinking is paramount to success, spinning multiple plates with precision timing to be able to successfully navigate to the next puzzle room. Mistimed actions will often result in death by laser. Ouch.



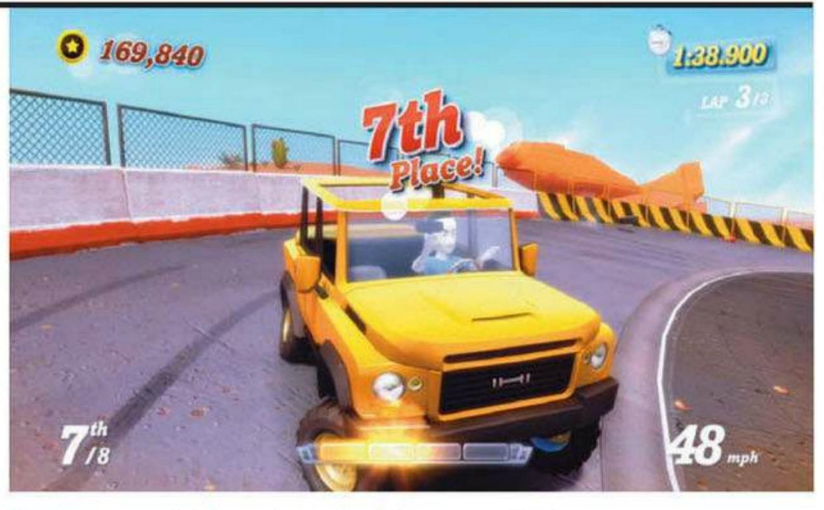


A FINE BRAIN-TICKLER IN ITS OWN RIGHT

THAT'S ONE 'BETTER WITH KINECT' CLAIM DISPROVED. ONLY ANOTHER HUNDRED TO GO

Joy Ride Turbo





Above: Your Avatar generally looks pretty happy at the end of every race, even if you have put in a miserable performance.

The general consensus among almost everyone who played *Kinect Joy Ride* was that it would have been better if it weren't a Kinect game and, curiously, Microsoft has decided to put that theory to the test by releasing a non-Kinect-powered version of much the same game onto Xbox Live Arcade.

And yes, funnily enough, when you're able to control *Joy Ride* reliably and consistently it is more fun to play. So if, by some remote chance, you saw *Kinect Joy Ride* and thought, 'I'd have bought that and played it to death if only it wasn't a Kinect game,' then *Joy Ride Turbo* is something of a dream come true.

It's *not* a sequel though. It really is just *Kinect Joy Ride* with Kinect stripped out and three new tracks, along with a new mode, slapped in. So if you've already played the Kinect version, we wouldn't suggest bothering with this at all. In terms of content, there's no real difference.

In terms of gameplay, *Joy Ride Turbo* does, of course, feel very different to *Kinect Joy Ride*, but it's still a fun, accessible, simplistic, generic arcade racer. You can control braking and acceleration now but, given that the game was designed to accommodate an auto-acceleration system, you'll have your finger jammed onto the right trigger almost all of the time, with the skill (and yes, there is *some* involved) being in judging drifts carefully and making effective use of power-ups and turbos.

Exploration is encouraged not just by the promise of short-cuts, but also by collectible car parts, which are needed to unlock new cars. The idea of exploration is fully exploited in the new Stunt Park mode, a significant improvement on *Kinect Joy Ride*'s non-racing modes. It's just a free-roam mode in which you collect various things, but the parks are well enough designed that there's fun to be had. It's just unfortunate that there are only two.

Joy Ride Turbo is a curious way to spend 800 Microsoft Points. It does what it does reasonably well, and there's enough content to justify the price (although hardly an abundance), but who really wants a non-Kinect version of a Kinect game that started life as a *free* Live Arcade release in the first place?

If you love kart racing – *Joy Ride* feels like a kart racer even though it doesn't actually feature any karts – so much that you want a comprehensive collection, then *Joy Ride Turbo* is fun and you will play it, for days if perhaps not weeks. But if your need will be satisfied by a single kart racer then there are plenty of other games that perform the same tricks to a higher standard. So get one of them instead.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BigPark
PRICE: 800 Points
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-8 Online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN — KINECT JOY RIDE



WORSE THAN — SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DIS-KINECT: Take motion control out of *Kinect Joy Ride* and you're left with not just a better game, but a pretty sad indictment of Kinect as a platform. Perhaps *Fable: The Journey* will turn things around.

VERDICT 6/10

MORE MILD AMUSEMENT THAN JOY



Below: The trick system is *very* simple. You simply hold either stick in any direction to spin your car through the air.



Below: Battles are simple in the most part but, as things progress, take on a far more strategic angle. Classes have to be used in combination in order to prevail, but things are so quick and straightforward that it's a joy to try out new tactics.





PROVING THE OLD MANTRA: IF IT IS BROKE, DO FIX IT

Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness Episode 3

A pre-made audience coupled with the safer (read: cheaper) sales environment that is download-only looked to be the ideal combination for the previous two *Penny Arcade Adventures* episodes, however, it wasn't to be. After rather poor sales of *Episode 2*, it looked as though the planned series was dead. Step forward Zeboyd Games, creators of breakout hits *Breath Of Death VII* and *Cthulhu Saves The World*, to save the series and – in a twist that you might not have expected – better the two previous entries in this particular series.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

REBIRTH: It took the seeming death of the series for this glorious rebirth to come about. While the first two episodes were okay, this is genuinely a very good experience.

As with Zeboyd's previous titles, *Penny Arcade Episode 3* harks back to earlier days of retro RPGs – in this case we're looking at a distinctly SNES-era JRPG, likely named 'Final' something or other. From a presentation standpoint, the game nails it – in fact, if it weren't for the tell-tale signs of self-awareness and streamlined mechanics, you'd be hard pushed to tell *Episode 3* was released in 2012. Genuinely. The look, the music, the flashing attack semi-animations: it's all perfect and, thanks to the tongue-in-cheek nature of the Penny Arcade setting, works all the better for it.

This fine presentation is backed up by some even finer in-game mechanics, though. They'll be instantly recognisable to any veteran of the RPG genre, but at the same time they bring up warm, nostalgic memories that'll work to counter any potential doubts you might have by fixing almost everything that's wrong, that's archaic, that's just stupid about early Nineties JRPGs. Gone are random battles (bar one memorable section, in which they are mocked anyway). Gone is the brick wall that comes with the need to grind, with even the most difficult of encounters able to be overcome using genuine strategy. Gone are the same old classes of seemingly every game with classes in them, replaced instead by half-comical/half-useful new classes – the Diva, for example, which is a very selfish class and harms its own teammates in order to make itself more powerful. Gone is the frustrating need to keep tabs on the health and wellbeing of your party, with everyone healed after each battle. Hell, even the game over screen disappears from one press of a button, dropping you back in the game one step away from the battle you just lost in. It's almost as if Zeboyd knows what is wrong with older RPGs and has gone to pains to fix these issues.

And so onto the setting, which will appeal – obviously – to Penny Arcade fans. It's funny, though not achingly so, and it isn't averse to repeating a joke. But the fact you can finish *Episode 3* in eight to ten hours means it doesn't outstay its welcome. Three pounds for a fantastic, surprisingly strategic tribute to the early Nineties SNES RPG era? Sounds good to us.



Below: There are enough references to SNES-era tropes to fill a large book of tropes, but there's also a section which transports our heroes to a world of even earlier JRPGS. It covers everything you'd expect.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360, Android, iOS, Mac
ORIGIN: United States
PUBLISHER: Zeboyd Games
DEVELOPER: In-house Entertainment/Iron Lore
PRICE: £2.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 1.6Ghz processor, 1GB RAM, Direct X 9.0c, 200MB HDD space, Windows XP
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN: PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES: OTRSPOD EPS 1-2



JUST LIKE: CTHULHU SAVES THE WORLD

VERDICT 8/10
GREAT STUFF; HOW ABOUT A PROPER SEQUEL?



Left: Boss battles are *Gunlord*'s most impressive spectacle but while big, they're far from clever – patterns are basic and most are a cinch to bring down.

A NEW DREAMCAST GAME CAN ONLY BE A GOOD THING, RIGHT? OH...

Gunlord

DETAILS
FORMAT: Dreamcast
OTHER FORMATS: NeoGeo
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: NG:DEV.TEAM
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: €32
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Don't worry, you haven't gone mad. Nor have you picked up an old issue of **games™** by mistake. No, there really is a Dreamcast game in our reviews section. As a magazine with a clear passion for all things retro, it's only natural that we should take an interest in a game which can be considered 'double retro'. Not only is it a new release for a long since discontinued console, it's also one that harks back to an even older era in gaming history. And as much as the idea of this two-fold retro celebration delights us, the execution here does neither the platform nor the genre being openly aped much in the way of justice.

Well, that's not strictly fair. *Gunlord* either succeeds or fails based on your own assessment of whether its primary goal is a worthwhile pursuit or not. You see, it's a pretty brazen *Turrican* clone in everything from design to gameplay. And while many modern twists on retro archetypes don't shy away from taking an almanac back in the time machine with them, *Gunlord* sticks to the rules of the day a little too rigidly whether by design or otherwise. Animation and hit boxes are both fairly ropey and despite the things it does well, the game can't help but feel like a homebrew Amiga port of a far superior arcade release.



And it seems harsh to call it up on what could quite easily be a conscious design choice when this blast from the past does actually do a fair few things well. The audio for one is spot on and the typically infectious chiptune score is great, if arguably just another area in which it's clear that the source material did it better than the imitator. The slideshow intro is nailed as well, amusing dialogue doing its bit to remind us just who "all our base are belong to". Level design, by contrast, feels a little messy and unstructured in places, though the huge stages certainly have plenty of alternate routes and hidden goodies for willing explorers to unearth.

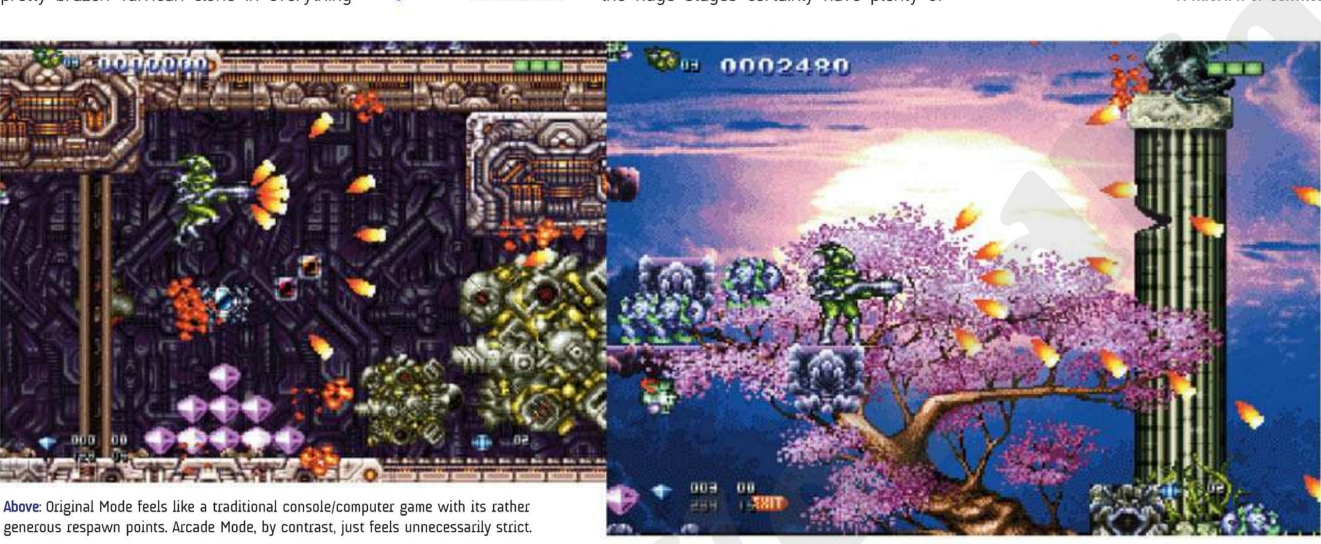
There's no particularly nice way of saying that *Gunlord* is just a second-rate *Turrican* after a garish *Halo* palette respray. It just seems odd that a game released so long after those it mimics should be comfortable in sharing their shortcomings rather than using everything learned and developed since to improve on the originals.

If you're the kind of person that still owns a Dreamcast that works – let alone one that still takes pride of place under a television – it's fair to suggest that you might also be the kind of person that will embrace so faithful a trip down memory lane. But in an age when indie releases are doing far more to sing the praises of retro gaming (and for next to nothing, more often than not), it's hard to see *Gunlord* as anything more than a well-meaning novelty.

MISSING LINK
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

NU-RETRO: While it's probably considered quaint and charming to release so unashamedly dated a game on a dead console, there's no avoiding the fact that the precision and depth possible today would

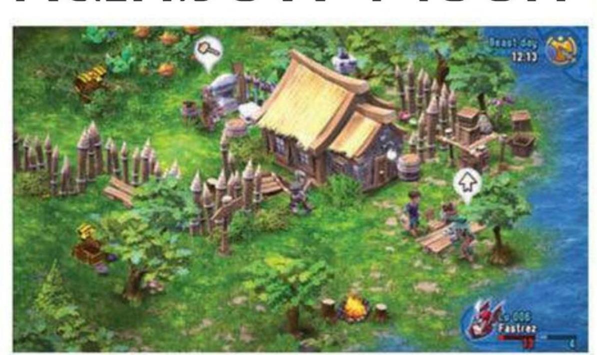
VERDICT 5/10
A TRIUMPH OF CONTROL



Above: Original Mode feels like a traditional console/computer game with its rather generous respawn points. Arcade Mode, by contrast, just feels unnecessarily strict.

SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW THERE'S ADVENTURE TO BE FOUND

Rainbow Moon



Left: Towns and camps are full of vendors that sell armour, skills, crafting ingredients and supplies. Rainbow coins come slowly through battles however, requiring some grinding to ensure you're never caught low on health and unable to afford healing potions.

Tactical RPGs are - by their very nature – intricate, stat-heavy and impenetrable. Only those willing to spend time to understand and break through layers of complex mechanics and strategy will see them through to the end. But as tactical as it may be, *Rainbow Moon* is accessible to the layman, thanks to plain-English tutorials, and a slow learning curve – even if it is tough from the outset.

The plot follows Baldren – a knight tricked into teleporting to *Rainbow Moon*, triggering a quest to find a way home. It's a streamlined narrative, free from reams of intrusive text, leaving most of the talking to NPCs found in towns and encampments. This keeps the action flowing nicely, but does water down the plot significantly.

As you explore large, colourful environments you will be prompted with random turn-based battles that you can choose to ignore or engage, removing the need for forced grinding – although you will need to grind a lot to level up further into the game. Once activated, the game transfers to a grid-based battle arena. Your tactical options are slim at the start of the quest, but grow slowly as you recruit new party members and purchase new skills from vendors. Each character has a set number of actions per turn, which can be used to move across the board, attack, spend MP on skills, defend or use items. It's a simple system to understand, but hides real depth.

Once you have a full party and are up against ten or more brutal enemies, you really do need to plan several steps ahead to come out the other side alive. Victories are then rewarded with experience, loot drops and Rainbow Pearls which can be cashed in for stat boosts via trainers.

As you plough through battles, the difficulty curve and amount of grinding required rises sharply around about level six, but thanks to a lenient checkpoint system, defeat simply results in Baldren respawning just before your previous battle with minimal health. Few games in the genre are this forgiving, but this is further testament to the careful balance between accessibility and challenge the developer has struck. This is helped along by drip-feeding status effects, skills, formation patterns and extra characters at a smart pace, ensuring you are never bombarded by information, but still provided with an ultra-strong tactical challenge throughout.

Although *Rainbow Moon's* narrative is dangerously threadbare, the locales are brimming with artistry and colour, bolstered by a superb soundtrack. For a digital release from a team that has produced just a handful of titles, this 40 hour-plus adventure stands proud besides full retail releases in terms of polish, content and execution. It's just a shame that it lacks the character and plot establishment of its peers.

DETAILS

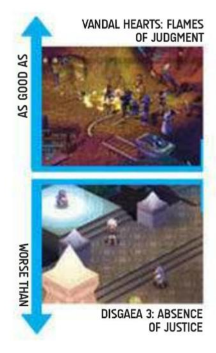
FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: China
PUBLISHER: eastasiasoft
DEVELOPER: SideQuest Studios
PRICE: £9.99/$14.99/€12.99
RELEASE: 4 July
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

VANDAL HEARTS: FLAMES OF JUDGMENT



WORSE THAN

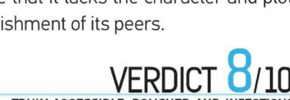


DISGAEA 3: ABSENCE OF JUSTICE

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

WHO ARE YOU? – Compared to the wacky cast of the Disgaea series, *Rainbow Moon's* mostly-silent cast just aren't fleshed out enough to strike a connection with the player. It's an unfortunate misstep.

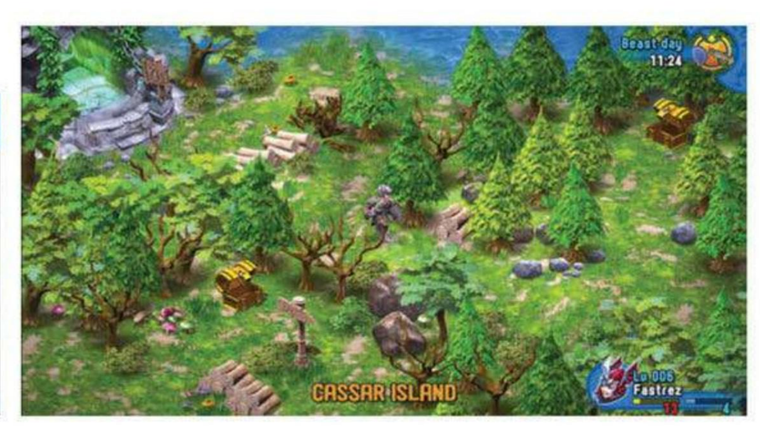


VERDICT 8/10

TRULY ACCESSIBLE, POLISHED AND INFECTIOUS

Below: Random battles occur more frequently during the night. If you want to skip time forward, simply rest at a campfire to heal your squad and advance the clock. While handy for levelling, night battles generally feature harder enemies.





THE PAUL MCGANN OF FRANCHISE TIE-INS

Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
OTHER FORMATS: PS Vita
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: BBC
DEVELOPER: Supermassive Games
PRICE: £20.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

DOCTOR WHO: RETURN TO EARTH



WORSE THAN



ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

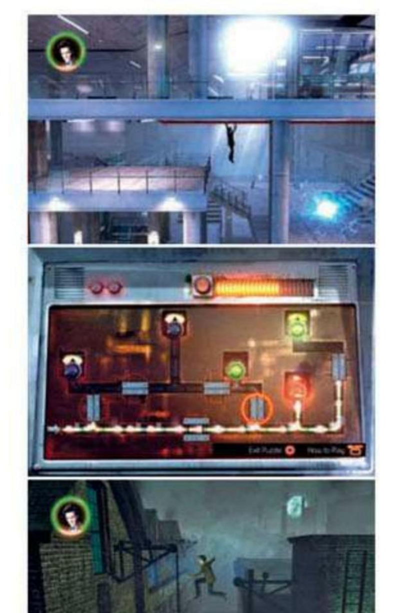
With unskippable cut-scenes after checkpoints, glitchy, bumblesome controls, instant-death stealth, remedial puzzles, impoverished level design and fail states that arrive without warning or instruction on how to avoid them, it's fitting that *The Eternity Clock* features a character who jumps around in time and space. Frankly, Supermassive's 2D puzzle platformer belongs to a shallow world of gaming that was left for dead before the turn of the millennium. It's so antiquated that you can't even drop in or out to play co-op; you're forced to start an entirely new game and play through every excruciating moment all over again with a partner for no real benefit.

Indeed, with quality developers continuing to close on a regular basis, it genuinely hurts to see a cynical, poorly designed and feebly implemented franchise tie-in like *The Eternity Clock* make it as far as retailers. Yes, it's a sanctioned *Doctor Who* adventure, written in conjunction with the show's team of typewriter-chained monkeys and featuring the voices of Matt Smith and Alex Kingston as The Doctor and River Song. And yes, the story is suitably intriguing, while Smith's performance is exactly as animated as you might hope, given his Saint Vitus Dance characterisation in the show – even if the in-game character model doesn't move its lips when he speaks.

For these attempts at fidelity it can be commended, and, if we're feeling generous, it also features some nice lighting at points. But beyond that? Well, it's exactly the sort of boot-up-once-and-never-again shovelware that dominated licensed gaming in the PSone era, and the sort of videogame every young fan would dread opening on Christmas morning because a kindly member of their extended family had remembered they liked the TV show. Thank god it's been released in the summer, when most people will be too busy to notice it even exists.



VERDICT 2/10
DOCTOR POO, MORE LIKE



Below: The main collectible in *The Eternity Clock* is a collection of hats. Sadly, The Doctor doesn't wear any of them; they're just there as arbitrary pick-ups, to stare at on a menu screen. Dreadful.

THE BIGGER THEY ARE, THE HARDER THEY FALL

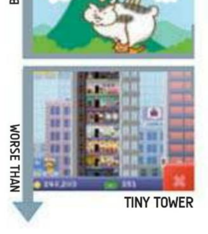
The Big Big Castle

DETAILS

FORMAT: iPad
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Beep Games
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: Free
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

MEW MEW TOWER



WORSE THAN

TINY TOWER

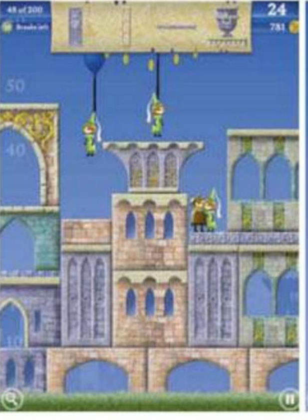
A surprise release from *DeathSpank* creators Ron Gilbert and Clayton Kauzlaric, *The Big Big Castle* is quite a departure for the RPG/adventure designers. A physics-based puzzler, it comes in two parts – in the first you build a tower to a given height by placing a random selection of pieces on top of each other without unbalancing them, and in the second you play an *Angry Birds*-style minigame in which you try to topple someone else's tower using a selection of weapons.

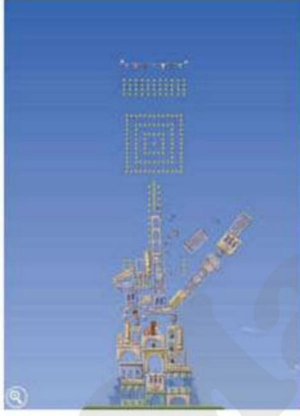
It's the first part that proves to be the most compelling in practice. Only four castle pieces are in stock at any one time, giving you few options for what to place down and, in the process, making for a very wobbly castle. As each level increases the maximum height requirement of the structure, your custom buildings become even more precarious and the stakes higher. Later levels ask you to place princesses, kings and courtesans within the structure, increasing high score possibilities in parallel to failure conditions as falling brickwork threatens to squash the life out of them. Which all makes for a very intense experience as you greedily build upwards toward the most unfeasible heights.

The second mode is less fun, since almost any structure can be destroyed with a few well placed UFO laser blasts. If only the designers had learned from the way *Angry Birds* limits the type of ammunition you can use on each stage, forcing you to play creatively with what you're given. Still, the option to hop online through GameCenter and smash a friend's castle to bits does at least add some novelty to the mode.

Overall, *The Big Big Castle* is more of a toy than a game, but as a free app that's more than justified. Play it as a distraction, playing for the sake of pure playfulness, and it's like those towers of building blocks you made as a kid… arguably at its most fun when the blocks come tumbling down.

VERDICT 7/10
MORE BLACKPOOL TOWER THAN EIFFEL





Above: A free download, *The Big Big Castle* thankfully doesn't throttle gameplay with tedious double-dip currency. It simply offers extra levels, for a fair price, in addition to a decent amount of initial content.







Left: *Uplink* makes no bones about its gameplay being very much 'Hollywood hacking', which makes perfect sense from both design and gameplay perspectives. There's also a narrative to be found in there, but most players will create their own stories.

WELCOME BACK, AGENT

Uplink

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
OTHER FORMATS: PC, Android
ORIGIN: Britain
PUBLISHER: Introversion Software
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £2.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Very few developers do atmosphere like Introversion. Between this, first released in 2001 on PC and now ported with the help of the community, and the 'big board' nuclear Armageddon sim *Defcon*, the British dev really knows how to crank up the feeling of existing in a world that reacts to your input. That it does this via nothing more than a simple world map, graphical user interface and email system is nothing short of remarkable. *Uplink*'s premise is simple but supremely effective: become the greatest computer hacker in the world. And don't get caught.

Working for the titular Uplink Corporation, at first things are simple. Accepting jobs from blue-chip firms to sabotage competing projects (by hacking their servers and deleting the information), or improving a client's academic standing by changing their degree from 2:1 to a first, the early game flies as you get to grips with the systems at work. Players learn never to break the golden rules: always route your hacks via as many IPs as possible, and get out while you can. The more cash you acquire, the better software/hardware you can afford, leading to bigger but riskier jobs.

The game flow never truly strays from those golden rules, and neither should you. But as in reality, hackers love a challenge, and *Uplink* fosters this feeling brilliantly: soon you'll be thinking about knocking off banks, breaking into criminal databases to remove any black marks against your name, and screwing over everyone to advance up the leaderboard and take your rightful position at the top of the hacking tree. For a game that looks like a bank manager's tie collection, there's a *Bond* villain-style creative streak that runs through *Uplink*.

It won't be long until you're planning daring heists, cackling manically as your devious plan runs to perfection (or, like most *Bond* villains, ruin), but this freedom is tempered by the ever-present dread that, if you get caught, it's game over. Choose wisely.

The conversion is remarkably accomplished, with the game's move to iOS hardly hindered at all by the loss of a physical keyboard and mouse, which could have scuppered the whole thing. In fact, there's now an immediacy to the action that wasn't there before: as your fingers scramble across the touchscreen, desperately hoping to beat the ever-present dread of the trace, it's hard not to think that this version might actually be superior. Old problems remain: the game can be utterly frustrating, especially if you're caught and all your hard work is erased, and it can be almost wilfully obtuse. But stick with it and you'll overcome these issues, and be a better player for it.

Very few games manage to make you feel like you do in *Uplink*: confident one second, paranoid the next, master of the universe and lowly cog in the system. Like Introversion's other coldly dispassionate classic *Defcon*, works so well because it essentially pits you against yourself, your abilities, your greed, and then punishes you remorselessly when you inevitably slip up. And you will.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CAUGHT ON THE JOB: The feeling of despair when you get caught hacking in *Uplink* is matched by few games, as it effectively deletes your progress when you slip up.

BETTER THAN
DEUS EX'S HACKING MINI-GAME

WORSE THAN
DEFCON

VERDICT 8/10
COMPELLING AND CHILLING IN EQUAL MEASURE

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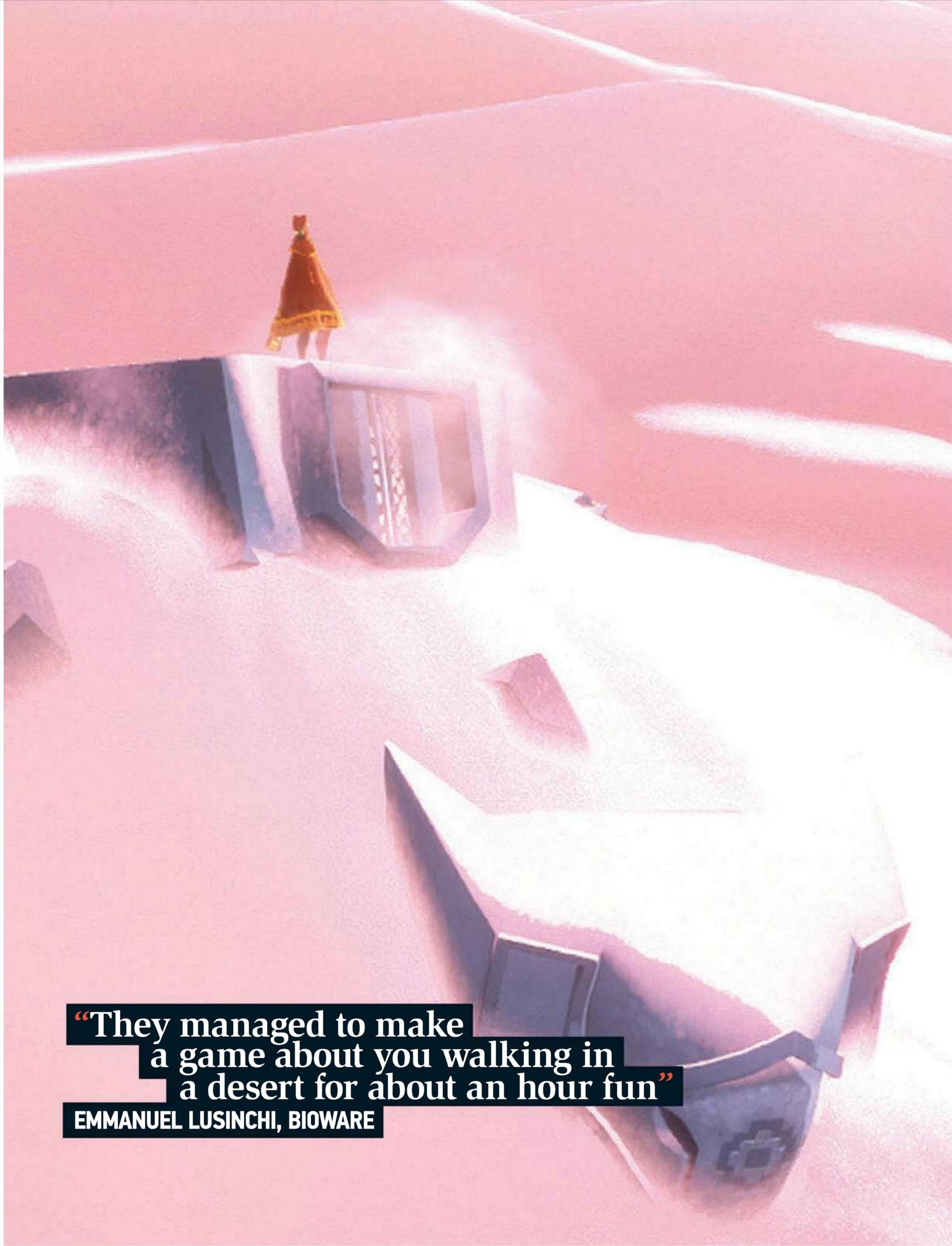
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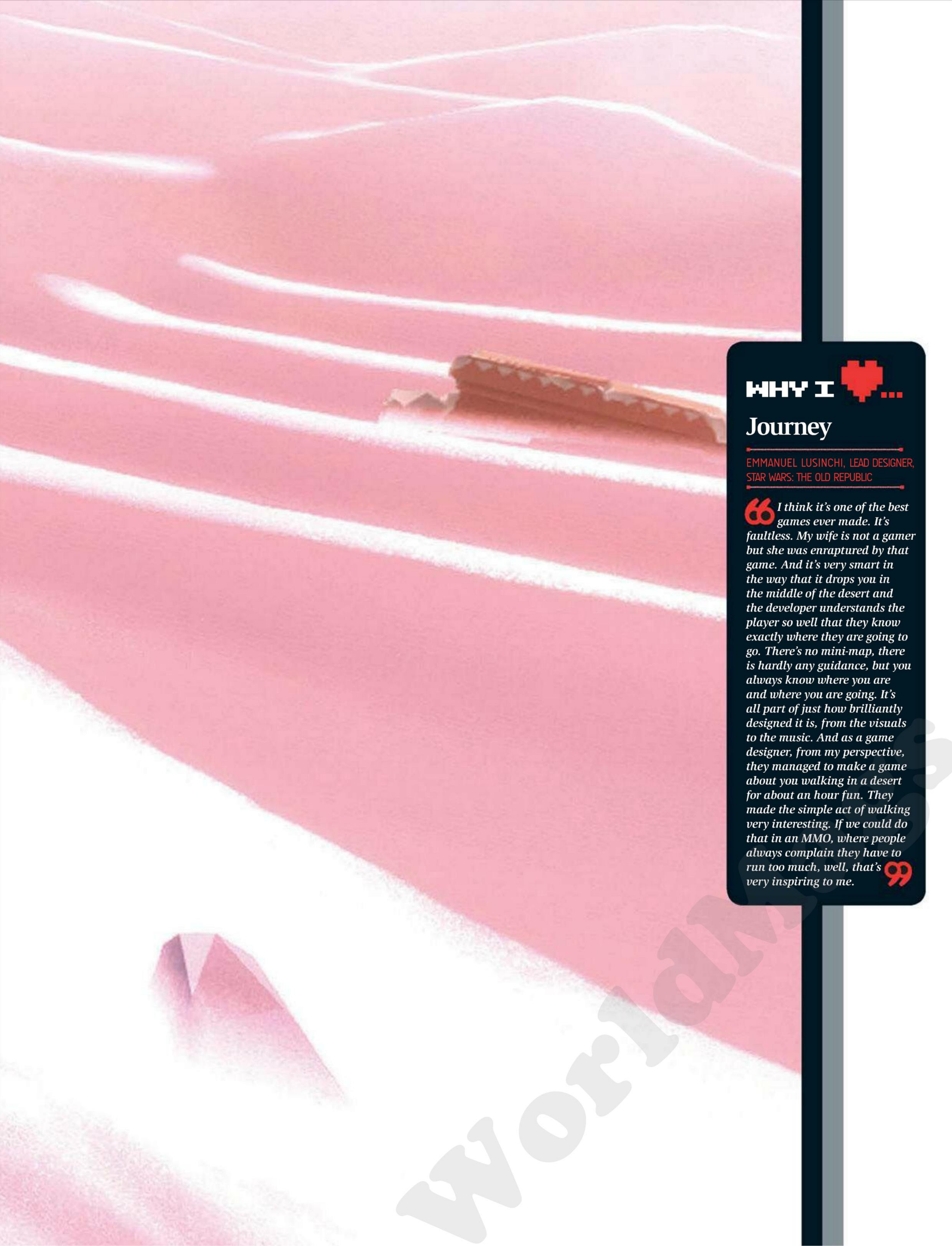
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"They managed to make a game about you walking in a desert for about an hour fun"
EMMANUEL LUSINCHI, BIOWARE



WHY I ♥...

Journey

EMMANUEL LUSINCHI, LEAD DESIGNER, STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

"I think it's one of the best games ever made. It's faultless. My wife is not a gamer but she was enraptured by that game. And it's very smart in the way that it drops you in the middle of the desert and the developer understands the player so well that they know exactly where they are going to go. There's no mini-map, there is hardly any guidance, but you always know where you are and where you are going. It's all part of just how brilliantly designed it is, from the visuals to the music. And as a game designer, from my perspective, they managed to make a game about you walking in a desert for about an hour fun. They made the simple act of walking very interesting. If we could do that in an MMO, where people always complain they have to run too much, well, that's very inspiring to me."



>. 'THE CHOICE IS YOURS!'

NO.125 JULY 2012

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RETRO

"THE MOST DYSFUNCTIONAL TEAM EVER"

THE MAKING OF DEUS EX

Warren Spector and John Romero talk to games™ about the tumultuous development environment that spawned one of the most influential RPGs ever made

IT IS SAID in life that the choices we make define us as individuals. Each minute decision contributes to our character; from the clothes we put on in the morning, to the route we take to work on a daily basis. Most choices merely transpire with little cause, but for Warren Spector a particular day in 1996 would go on to define his whole career.

"In late '96 I left Looking Glass and was independent and I had a proposal for what I thought was going to be the *Command & Conquer* role-playing game," remembers Spector. "I had my pen poised over a contract with Westwood – which was part of EA – and I was about to sign the contract to make the game when John Romero called me up and said 'make the game of your dreams.' He said 'no one will ever tell you what to do. No creative interference at all and a marketing budget three times bigger than you've ever had. Make your game.'

For Spector, the choice was simple. He took a proposal rejected by EA for a real-world role-playing game titled *Troubleshooter* centred around, as Spector describes, "a CIA guy who discovers that he's working for the bad guys" and migrated to Ion Storm in Dallas, Texas. Bringing with him several key members of Looking Glass Technologies – the pioneering development house behind *Thief* and *System Shock*, which was on the cusp of closure due to financial crisis – the team soon set to work on sculpting a sprawling open-ended cyberpunk noir inspired by Spector's love of his favourite game: *Dungeons & Dragons*.

"I've spent my whole life trying to recreate the experience of playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, where either things never end or the ending is driven by the players," he enthuses. But the original design document that Spector concocted would undergo multiple transformations during development before eventually spawning the final product that players recognise today. "We certainly documented the hell out of that game," he recalls. "It was a very iterative process. We realised stuff didn't work and we changed it, we rebuilt maps over and over again." A particular and fundamental aspect of the game that Spector designed himself would be one such area that would undergo a substantial renovation during production. "I designed a skills system for *Deus Ex* that we actually implemented and tested. And all the testers told me it sucked and I looked at it and said 'wow, that did not work the way I expected it to at all.' Three days later Harvey Smith comes in with a document outlining a different skill system and I just looked at it and went 'oh yeah. That is way better than the one I came up with.' "



Spector and Harvey Smith's relationship would define the tumultuous production of *Deus Ex*. Spector mentored Smith as a tester on *System Shock* and they spent their evenings discussing scripting and simulation until the early hours of the morning. "He just got it," says Spector of his former colleague. "It wasn't like he was an continued>

CONSPIRACY THEORY

THE MANY CONSPIRACIES THAT INFLUENCED DEUS EX



THE WHITE HOUSE'S SECRET ROOM

Spector's team compiled various blueprints and public images of the White House and discovered a secret hole. This was originally to feature in the game.



AREA 51

The clandestine military bunker that houses extraterrestrial life is always popular with conspiracy theorists. It features heavily in *Deus Ex*'s narrative.



ILLUMINATI/KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

The 'man behind the curtain', it's believed that the Illuminati and Knights Templar between them pull the strings behind the world's governments.



ECHELON

Theories on the signals intelligence collection and analysis network claim it invades public privacy, or is used by the US government for industrial espionage.



BLACK HELICOPTERS

It's believed that these military choppers act as a warning sign of an alleged military takeover of the United States.



opinionated guy who was right a lot, he was just a sponge and open to learning. I love that guy as if he was my son." On *Deus Ex*, however, the two designers would clash over various elements. "We certainly had our share of conflict over the years, which I think derives from a whole Oedipal thing I choose not to think about. But I love that guy. He makes me so much better when we work together.

"I had a story that I wanted to tell that was enormous and sprawling, and we worked on it and worked on it, and much of it survived," he continues. "But one day Harvey and Steve Powers – who is magical by the way – came to me and said 'can we go out to lunch? We need to talk about the story.' I remember the restaurant and I remember where we sat; it was an amazing moment. They said 'this story is too big and we don't have the tools to express this story in our game. How about we do this?' And they presented this streamlined version of the story that was in every way better than what I came up with. In those tangible ways he makes me better. Harvey is a really smart, really analytical guy who totally bought into the Looking Glass approach to game development and design. I knew that the minute I met Harvey. It was instant."

"We were in a world that was all screwy," Spector remembers. "Everywhere you turned on the internet there was another conspiracy theory and there were books coming out that were about conspiracy things, FEMA, evil and the world ending when Y2K hits. It was in the air. It was impossible to avoid."

DEUS EX MAINTAINED the themes that inspired Spector in the Nineties, a congruent amalgamation of fact, fear and high-fantasy that punctured the budding pessimism and technological fascination of the time. The Ion Storm team would strip back aspects of the story – the White House was originally a fully explorable environment – but the ambition remained. "We didn't want to make stuff up, we wanted to assume that it was stuff people already believed or was really happening – we were just going to extrapolate a little bit. All that augmented soldier stuff is all real – if you came over to Junction Point now, I still have all our *Deus Ex* research stuff here. I have six three-inch-wide loose-leaf notebooks of articles that I clipped. Executive orders going back to Eisenhower and all the way up to Ronald Reagan on how FEMA can take over the United States tomorrow if they want. We were just building on what people believed to be true."

> "THE EARLY TENSION FORCED US TO DEFINE [THE GAME] IN A WAY A MORE UNIFIED TEAM WOULDN'T"



■ The use of augmentations and skill points was something of a minor revolution back in the late Nineties. From the get-go players could customise their character depending on the type of gameplay they preferred.



Efforts to streamline the story didn't diminish the complexities of crafting a game with multiple gameplay avenues that players could explore to fulfil objectives. It's easy to forget that such a garden-variety structure was innovative to PC gamers of the late-Nineties, but creating a system that seamlessly mixed stealth and combat components took its toll on the development team. To achieve this Spector put together some of the industry's most talented individuals, skilled in either discipline. But these two design sensibilities inevitably clashed. As **games**™ delicately asks whether development was tense, Spector bursts into a fit of giggles. "Oh God yeah," he laughs. "I'm trying to think if I've ever worked on a functional team. *Deus Ex* might have been the most dysfunctional team ever. That was partly by design, foolishly, and partly just because it happened."

Once the laughter subsides, Spector sighs, casting his mind back to the daily stresses of the project. "The reality is that a lot of the leads on that team just really hated each other," he admits. "They hated working with each other. I felt a lot of the time that I was the only one who saw how brilliant each individual component was and if I did nothing else on that project, preventing everybody from killing each other and preventing that team from fracturing – which it could've done – was probably the most important thing I did."

It was a pragmatic choice that threatened to derail the development of *Deus Ex*. Hiring a combination of Looking Glass alumni well-versed in immersive simulation and designers straight off the back of *Ultima* games, Spector had to arbitrate two factional teams. "I knew I was in trouble when I had to call one of the two groups Design Team One and the other one I had to call Design Team A," he chuckles. "It sounds hypocritical but it's all true. Ultimately, that tension got so bad, and I bet a lot of people will disagree with this, but I will go to my grave believing that the early tension forced us to define what the game was in a way that a more unified team wouldn't."

The news of unrest in the Austin offices eventually reached John Romero continued>

THE UNMAKING OF: DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

THREE THINGS WARREN SPECTOR WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY ON THE DEUS EX SEQUEL

When it came to making a sequel to *Deus Ex*, Spector took a step back creatively to allow Harvey Smith to direct the project. Asked whether he regrets withdrawing control, Spector hesitantly says "yes and no. It got to a point at the end of *Deus Ex* that if I said that I was going to be the director of *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Harvey would've left. Appropriately, I would've been the glass ceiling he couldn't break through in his career." While Spector still had a creative input, he has some lingering regrets about the sequel. "I had to get out of Harvey's way and let him do his own thing. What I regret is there were two or three decisions that he made that I said 'don't do this!' And he said 'no I really want to do this.' and I should have said 'Harvey don't do this – I have one more vote than you.' "

1



JUMPING AHEAD TWENTY YEARS

"I told him don't move it farther in the future," says Spector of the decision to set the game some 20 years after the events of the original. *Invisible War* would use a confused combination of all three of the original's endings for the setup of the sequel.

2



UNIFIED AMMO

Each weapon throughout *Invisible War* uses the same ammunition, which was another feature that Spector warned Smith against implementing. The nanotechnology explanation was baloney and players found the likes of rocket launchers and pistols sharing rounds ultimately jarring.

3



FACTION CHANGES

"By letting you change factions any time you wanted, it made your factional choice irrelevant… [it] had no consequences and that completely undercut the whole point of *Deus Ex*. People thought it was a game about players making choices but it was not – it was a game about players dealing with the consequences of their choices.

in Dallas, which worried some of the co-founders. "I heard news of strange things from some of the artists that moved from the Dallas office to Warren's Austin team," Romero tells **games™**. "I didn't really care what was going on in Austin since it was Warren's kingdom and he could rule it however he wanted. Two of my co-founders wanted to shut down the Austin studio because of these crazy reports, but I told them no – we are going to stick with Warren because that might be the kind of process he uses to get great things done. We don't know, and I didn't want to mess it up. My co-founders tried multiple times to shut down the Austin office, but I refused to disturb Warren. However Warren works, whatever kind of process it entails, at the end there is a great game. I held to my belief and kept the Austin studio alive."

SPECTOR PUT THE team through their paces, dispensing with established tropes such as hidden dice rolls and implementing dynamic reactive AI, all while using the original Unreal engine, which Spector says was "kind of hacked" – at the time it was predominantly utilised for first-person shooters. With Eidos stumping up the cash and Ion Storm's reputation for frittering away funds, the publisher, wary about the creative direction, cast a watchful eye over the production.

"I don't even want to tell you how many times folks at Eidos tried to tell me to do stuff," says Spector. "I'll never forget one conversation where the publishing committee at Eidos asked me 'what percentage of your players are going to sneak through this game?' And I said 'honestly, based on my experience, it's going to be about 20 to 30 per cent and other people are just going to play it like a shooter.' And they said 'well just make a shooter then! Why are you spending any money on something that 70 or 80 per cent of your players don't care about?' "

Luckily Romero kept to his word and Spector and the rest of the team escaped the thrifty gaze of the publisher. This unprecedented liberty not only enabled Ion Storm to craft the story they wanted to tell but also enabled quirks in the design that imbued the game with an incomparable sense of freedom. It wasn't so much a case of taking augmented counter-terrorist agent JC Denton down either route A or B, but discovering an uncharted route C.

"I'm still to this day frankly amazed at the solutions to problems players come up with," says Spector of players who strolled off the beaten track and discovered alternative methods to complete objectives. "The whole point of *Deus Ex* was to sort of institutionalise the idea that it's not about how clever and creative we are as designers and developers, but it's how clever and creative players are in using our tools. The way you identify success in a game like this is when players do something you don't expect." During testing, they found that players started to exploit design constraints – a discovery that thrilled the team. One such exploitation involved stacking LAM (Lightweight Attack Munitions) against a wall to create routes outside of the map. "Oh my God, you wouldn't believe the guys at Eidos," groans Spector. "They all thought, 'it's a bug – you've got to fix it!' Our response was 'no that's not a bug – that's exactly what we want.' I think it was Steve Powers who came up with 'well, let's just put crates and ladders outside our game maps, so if they get out they can climb back in.' "

These fundamental design choices were at the service of player freedom, which ultimately culminated in the moment players had to decide for themselves how the game

"OUR [ENDING WAS INELEGANT] BECAUSE WE COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING BETTER"



■ "They ripped us off!" says Warren Spector on his first thoughts when watching *The Matrix* back in 1999 during *Deus Ex*'s development. It was only later that he realised that both were tapping into the same prophetic themes.

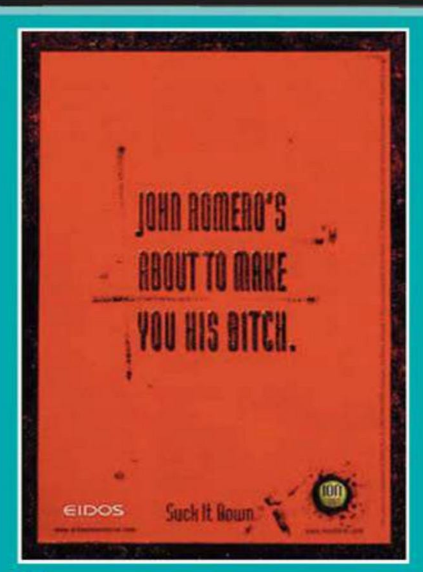


■ The game remains challenging to this day, with separate hit points and a brutal health meter. The difficulty level certainly encouraged players to take a light-footed approach to missions.



WEATHERING THE ION SHITSTORM

HOW DEUS EX OVERCAME ITS DEVELOPER'S INNER STRUGGLES



John Romero was at the top of his game during the Nineties – that game being a ferocious first-person shooter called *Quake*. And then *Daikatana* happened. While Warren Spector and his team toiled away at Ion Storm's Austin-based offices, the Dallas headquarters found themselves in the midst of a PR nightmare.

Daikatana, at the height of its hype, took an unusual approach to marketing. An ad for the game declared 'John Romero's about to make you his bitch. Suck it down." The idea of putting Romero at the forefront of the marketing had some merit, but the tactless approach rubbed fans up the wrong way.

"Oh, I definitely regret those marketing decisions, and apologised for the debacle in an interview with Gamesauce last year. The marketing director on the Ion Storm side made all kinds of controversial decisions like running image adverts that just had our faces in them, his too of course, and no games, the infamous Bitch ad (invented by The Richards Group), and other ridiculous stuff," Romero tells **games**™. "The Austin office definitely thought there was a screw loose up in Dallas and they were right. After the Dallas office closed, the Austin office decided they wanted to change the name of the studio, but Warren kept it alive. Warren has great integrity."

It may have caused Romero undue frustration, but the ever-ebullient Warren Spector didn't take the campaign quite so seriously. "I was embarrassed about it but it never worried me particularly," he says. "My attitude about all this is that games are important and I love them, but at the end of the day we're just making games. We're not curing cancer, we're not solving world hunger problems and we're not bringing world peace. We're making videogames."



■ The visuals could never be classed as cutting edge, even for the time. Somehow, the William Gibson, *Blade Runner* and *Ghost In The Shell* influences shone through the rather clunky presentation.

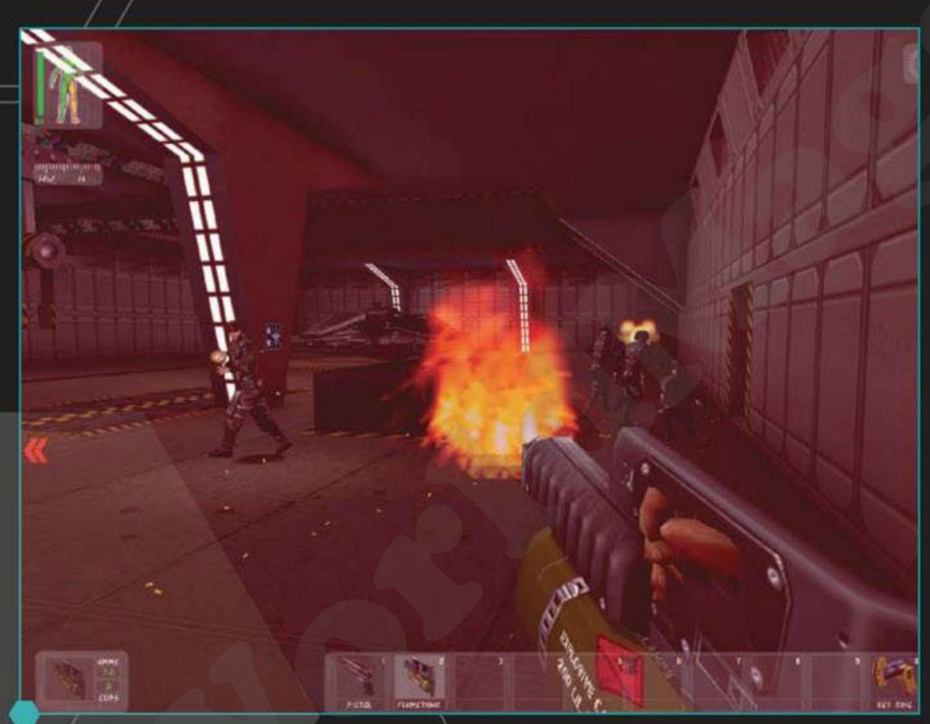


■ The game uses several real-world locations as epicentres to major terrorist operations. The opening mission drops players on Liberty Island, wherein the player must infiltrate the decapitated Statue Of Liberty to interrogate a target.

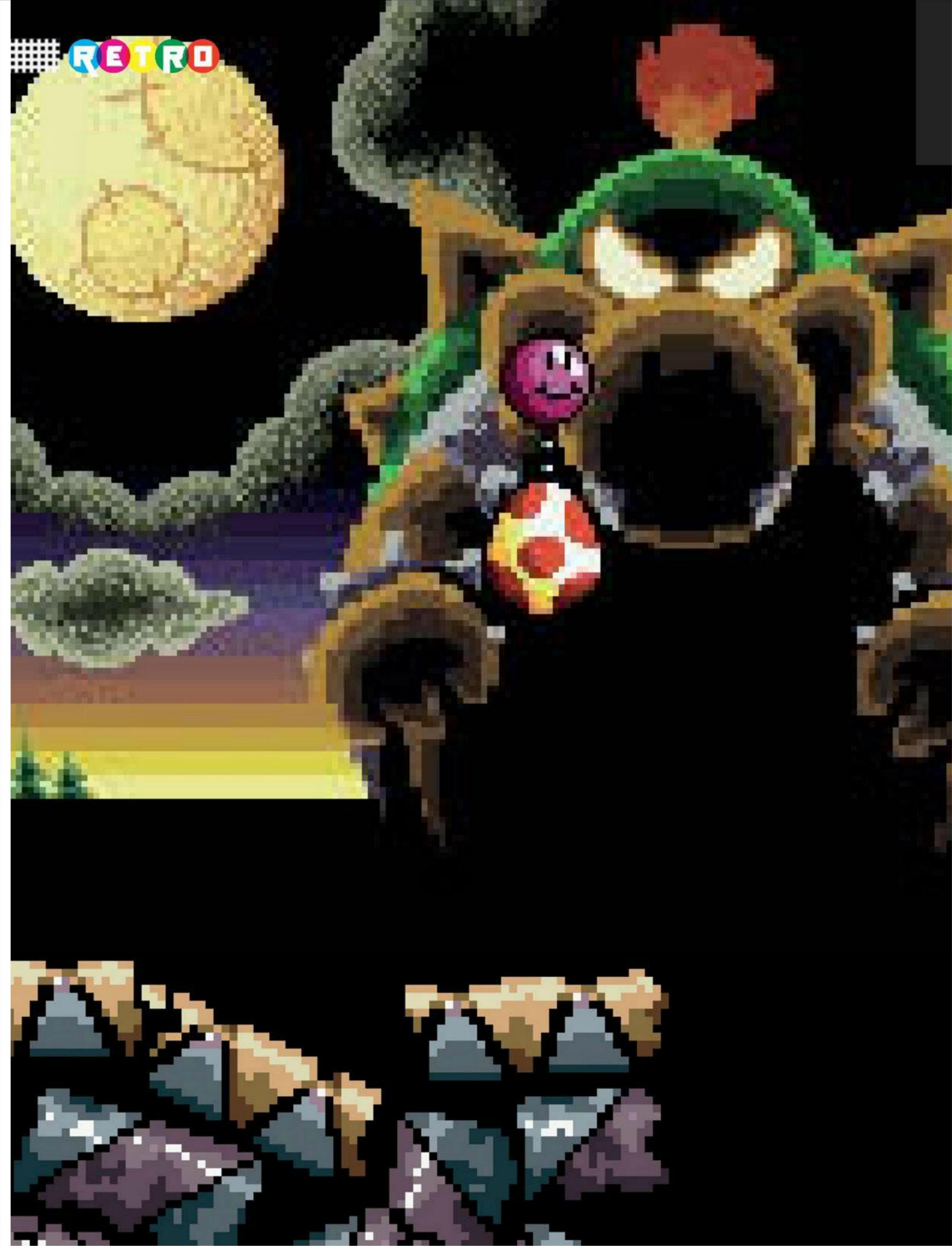
would end. Determining the fate of JC Denton was channelled into one of three shades of morally grey as the player had the choice of allying Denton with one of three menacing factions. It was a narrative punctuation that had a lasting effect on its audience due to a simple choice.

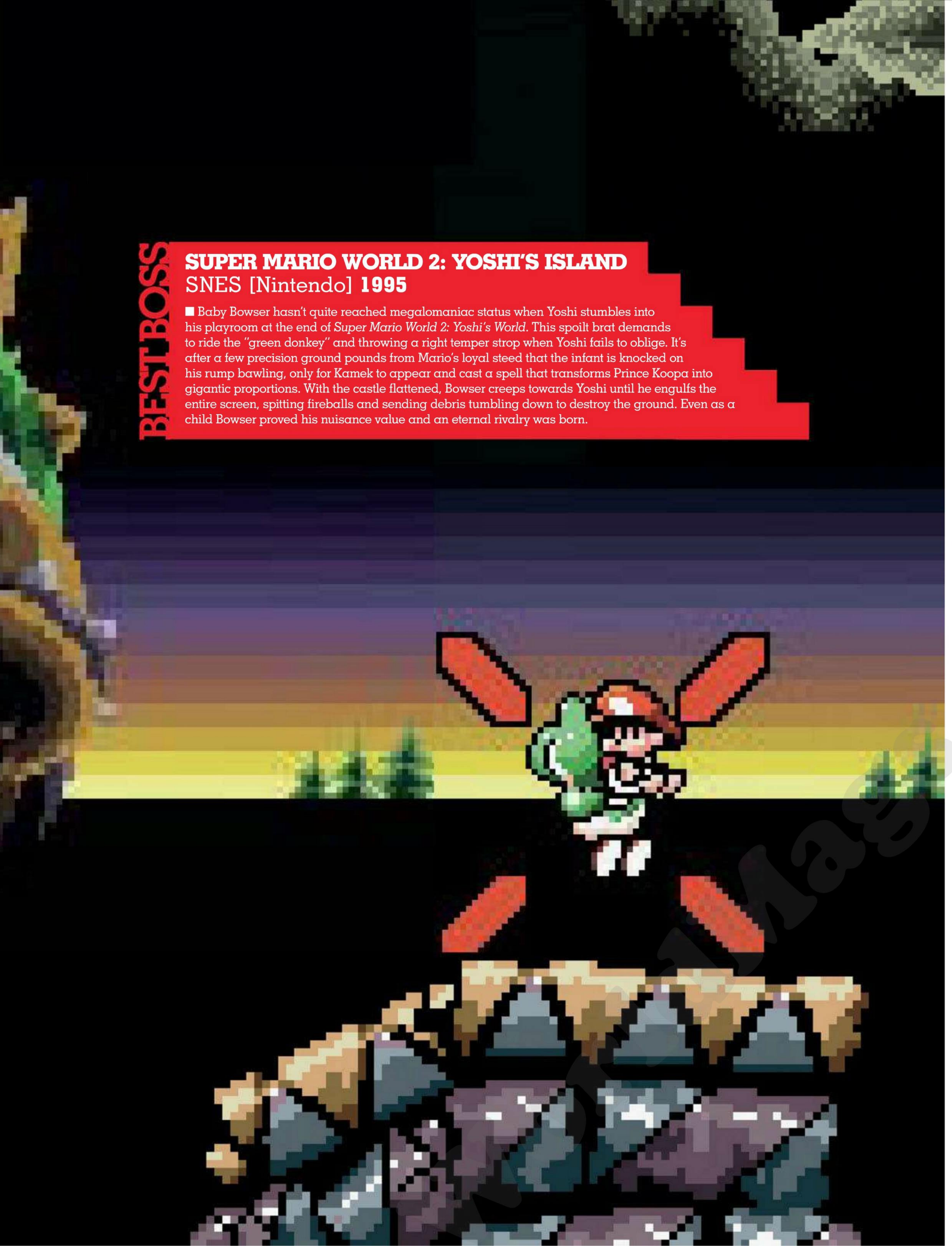
"I'm sitting here grinning and laughing because I look back on *Deus Ex* and think how inelegant our solution was then because we couldn't think of anything better," says Spector. "You really do own the step-by-step, minute-to-minute gameplay, but it's a completely linear game. Every single player does exactly the same things, which is why I think the story was as powerful as it was. We got to the last mission and we said 'which door will he choose?' It was *The Lady, or the Tiger?* (the classic short story). There are three doors and you pick which one you want. The weakness of the short story and many games that followed is that the door is random; it's just 'let's make a deal.' In *Deus Ex* we asked you to stop and think which door do you think makes sense."

The lasting success and legacy of *Deus Ex* speaks for itself: it contributed to the proliferation of cyberpunk media, spawned two sequels and won multiple awards. Spector doesn't regret any of the choices he made. Each decision had a formative ramification on the game that ultimately determined its identity. "I think that tension really did work in a way," he reflects. "I told people then that everybody needs to chill, because in years to come everyone is going to look back on this and say we did something special. Everyone is going to forget the bad stuff and remember that we did something special."



■ Publisher Eidos suggested making *Deus Ex* a straight FPS, but Romero and Spector stuck to their guns.


RETRO



BEST BOSS

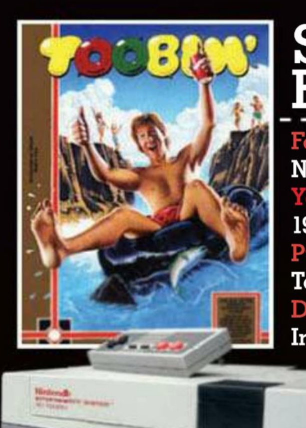
SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

SNES [Nintendo] **1995**

■ Baby Bowser hasn't quite reached megalomaniac status when Yoshi stumbles into his playroom at the end of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's World*. This spoilt brat demands to ride the "green donkey" and throwing a right temper strop when Yoshi fails to oblige. It's after a few precision ground pounds from Mario's loyal steed that the infant is knocked on his rump bawling, only for Kamek to appear and cast a spell that transforms Prince Koopa into gigantic proportions. With the castle flattened, Bowser creeps towards Yoshi until he engulfs the entire screen, spitting fireballs and sending debris tumbling down to destroy the ground. Even as a child Bowser proved his nuisance value and an eternal rivalry was born.

CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports, under the spotlight





SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: NES
Year: 1989
Publisher: Tengen
Developer: In-House

TOOBIN'

ORIGINAL RELEASE Board: Atari System 2 Year: 1984 Publisher: Atari Games Developer: In-House

RELEASED IN 1988 and starting life as a kayak racer before it received a radical makeover, *Toobin'* saw two rubber ring-riding beach dudes risk life and limb in treacherous white waters in the pursuit of reaching an epic beach party.

Sharing a number of similarities with the Atari classic *Paperboy*, the game quickly became a popular coin guzzler in its own right. But where it really came into its own was when played with a second player, thanks to its ingenious head-to-head versus mode and frantic control scheme.

On its dash, the control buttons were configured in a circle to represent the shape of a rubber ring, and players would bash away at them madly to rotate their 'tuber' and get them through the point gates first. This might sound a little fiddly but in practice it suited the style of the game perfectly and created tense and entertaining two player battles.

Following its arcade success *Toobin'* was ported to a handful of systems. However, without a cabinet to back them up, nearly all failed to capture the thrill of the arcade game. The most disappointing conversion, though, was a deflated-feeling NES port by Tengen, which failed to recognise any of the things that made the arcade game fun and popular.

While the original looked bright, lively and inviting, this conversion has about as much life and atmosphere as a cave full of old books and mannequins. More river mild than river wild, with the pace of the game feeling laggard and the stages bland and empty, the thrilling courses of the arcade game felt more like lazy rivers on the NES. Even the party-themed finishing lines were replaced with boring looking whirlpools, a lame and lazy exchange which, when you think about it, makes no sense in the context of the game – you spend all your time avoiding dangers just so you can paddle into the eye of a natural one.

If all that wasn't enough to upset fans, Tengen stuck the knife in further by failing to include a simultaneous head-to-head mode. Instead friends had to take it in turns getting as far in the game as they could. It even messed around with the control system, locking the tubes in place so that they didn't rotate, and giving players traditional eight-way movement instead, a change that sank a lot of the nostalgia, fun and challenge.

HEAD TO HEAD

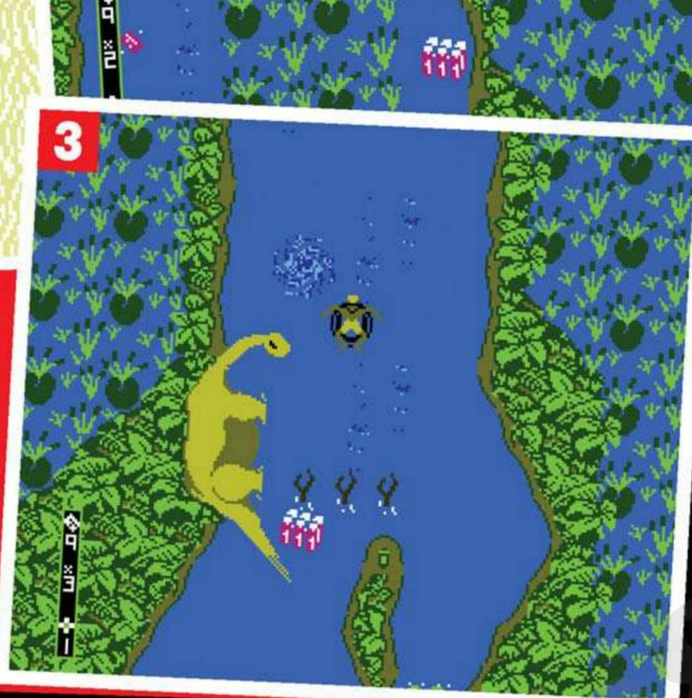
ARCADE



NES







THE BREAKDOWN

1 Just look at it. The original packed itself full of rich colour, detail and imaginative hazards, while this conversion plays like spot the sprite. Even the stages look similar as background sprites get overly reused. Were it not for a heavily repeated dinosaur sprite then the Jurassic and Okefenokee courses would look identical.

2 The original controls were great; you had four buttons for rotating and paddling the rubber ring, and another for firing cans. Here control is made boringly idiot-proof. This port controls like a vertical shooter, with the A and B buttons firing cans at fixed left and right angles. It removes a lot of the game's charm.

3 The most galling thing about this conversion is the fact it doesn't have a head-to-head multiplayer mode. Ask any fan of the original game and they'll tell you this is like playing a home version of *Mortal Kombat* with the Fatalities removed, or *Virtual Fighter 2* without the drunk old guy.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED IT ON

Format: **ZX Spectrum** Year: **1989** Publisher: **Domark** Developer: **Krisalis Software**



■ Krisalis Software's Spectrum port is a stunning effort, and greatly surpasses the NES port. The graphics are packed with detail, and the control system is spot-on too. We'd argue this is one of the most technically impressive coin-op Speccy conversions released.

THE COMPLETE HI

1994 WAS A sad year for many gamers, as it marked the official death of the 8-bit home computer. With the Spectrum and Amstrad having long since bitten the dust, it was down to a handful of systems, including the Commodore 64 and BBC Micro to fly the 8-bit flag for a few more months. Developers were squeezing every last drop of power out of the once-popular home micros, sometimes providing amazing results in the form of releases like *Lemmings* on the C64, but it wasn't enough. Both machines bravely limped on, but it was impossible for them to compete against the 16-bit consoles and computers that were dominating the precious play time of gamers the world over. Interestingly, it's possible that the C64 may have had survived for a little longer. After all, it was a technically proficient machine, and still had an impressive amount of support, even if it looked ancient next to the Amiga 500 and CD32.

YEAR IN 19

Sadly, the C64 was wiped out by the same killer stroke that finished off the recently released CD32, Amiga 1200 and other Commodore machines, namely the death of Commodore itself. While the company had found big success with its Commodore 64 and Amiga 500, as technology progressed, more and more competitors began to appear and Commodore's machines were starting to look dated. The introduction of the Amiga 1200 and its powerful AGA chipset appeared to be the boost that Commodore needed to keep it in line with its competitors, but by then, both Apples and PCs had made significant market penetration. As more and more developers moved over to these systems, consumer faith began to waver. Piracy, too, is said to have made an impact, and we knew of many gamers at the time who had a library of copied disks in their collections that would often outstrip their purchased releases. It came down to the CD32 to save Commodore from bankruptcy. Released in September 1993, it actually proved extremely popular, selling the most units of any CD-ROM-based console that year. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to stop Commodore from going under, and it declared bankruptcy on April 29 1994.

The name Commodore continues to live on though, with Commodore USA, which was founded in 2010 and has released the Commodore OS, a Linux-based operating system.

If things were bad for Commodore,

Namco's *Ridge Racer* was a launch title for Sony's PlayStation, and one of its most popular early releases.

The first-person shooter continued to dominate in 1994, with thanks to the likes of *Doom 2* and the excellent *System Shock* from Looking Glass Studios.

Earthworm Jim was a massive success for Shiny Entertainment. Created by Doug TenNapel, it arrived on a 24 Meg cartridge. Needed for all the stunning animation.

After 12 long years the Commodore 64 was finally discontinued. We often wonder if it would have survived longer if Commodore had done.

STORY OF GAMES

they were positively rosy for Nintendo, with the Japanese giant proclaiming that 1994 was to be the 'Year of the Cartridge'. It was easy to understand Nintendo's optimism. Despite slightly trailing behind the Mega Drive in 1994, it was nevertheless gaining momentum and would eventually go on to win the 16-bit console war. Nintendo's Game Boy continued to be a massive success, while 1994 also saw it introduce the Super Game Boy add-on, which enabled Game Boy cartridges to be played on a SNES, as well as the first glimpse of Project Reality (which would later become the N64). Defiantly steering away from the CD-ROM market, Project Reality's early news stories generated huge excitement, with many games magazines of the time suggesting that the visuals would be on par with those created for *Jurassic Park*, which had come out the previous year and had also benefitted from the technology of Silicon Graphics. Of course the actual reality of the N64's power would be greatly diminished once it appeared two years later, but that didn't stop the gaming press from going completely gaga over the exciting-looking console.



Nintendo wasn't the only console developer keen on pushing new hardware, as many of its rivals also released new machines to varying degrees of success in 1994. Bandai released its disappointing Playdia, which managed to churn out just 33 games before it was cancelled in 1996, while NEC and SNK both dabbled with CD-ROM-based systems. NEC's PC-FX was released in Japan and fared little better than the Playdia (62 titles, discontinued 1998), while SNK released a CD version of its Neo Geo home system. While it featured some excellent games, including titles from *The King Of Fighters* and *Metal Slug* franchises, it was let down by lengthy loading times and unreliable disc drives.

Sega was also making inroads, releasing a TV channel in America that offered Mega Drive games on subscription via a cable box, the ill-fated 32X add-on for the Mega Drive, as well as a portable version of its 16-bit console called the Nomad. November also saw it releasing its Sega Saturn, a 32-bit console that would hopefully see it confirm its place as the number one home console seller. Bundled with the killer app of *Virtua Fighter*, the system shifted 170,000 units on its very first day of release.

Sega's success seemed assured, particularly as Project Reality was nowhere to be seen and that it's only other possible rival, Sony, hadn't even launched its first console yet. That console, the PlayStation, arrived two weeks later on December 03 and, as we'll reveal next month, it changed everything...

Originally released in 1993, Sega's smash arcade hit became a launch title for its 32-bit Saturn. Whilst the port was far from perfect, it nevertheless helped Sega shift systems.

Warcraft: Orcs & Humans was the third game under the newly formed Blizzard Entertainment and was a highly entertaining RTS. It has gone on to become one of gaming's biggest franchises.

Sony's console was late to the party, not launching until December 03 1994. Its impact on the industry, however, would be absolutely massive.

DEVELOPER of the YEAR: Cliff Bleszinski

Nowadays you can't read a games magazine without reading something about Epic's charismatic front man. Back in 1994 it was quite a different story though, with Bleszinski being relatively unknown. Starting his career in 1992 with *The Palace Of Deceit: The Dragon's Plight*, he soon landed himself a job at Epic MegaGames (as the company was then known) and started work on his first project, the 1993 *Dare To Dream Volume One: In The Darkened Room*. His first proper project was the excellent platformer *Jazz Jackrabbit*, Bleszinski's answer to *Sonic The Hedgehog*, which he absolutely adored. It will be interesting to see if he ever returns to the rabbit that helped turn him into a household name.



EXTENDED PLAY: **1994**

SUPER METROID

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review…. This month, we revisit Nintendo's most atmospheric adventure

EVEN TODAY, SOME 18 years after its debut, *Super Metroid* oozes an atmosphere quite unlike any other game on the Super Nintendo. Directed by Makoto Sakamoto while under the watchful eyes of the late Gunpei Yokoi, *Super Metroid* is an interesting title, because, rather than taking the genre in exciting new directions, it instead built solidly on what had already come before it.

That game was of course *Metroid*, and while it wasn't technically the first example of a Metroidvania game, it's arguably one of the most influential. Having already worked on the original *Metroid*, Sakamoto knew its popularity, so the trick with *Super Metroid* was how to build on that success, while making it its own game.

The answer, as we mentioned already, was atmosphere, and plenty of it. Even though *Super Metroid* rarely relied on cut-scenes and had very little dialogue, it's arguably one of the most cinematic games of the 16-bit period. While PC and Amiga titles were happily experimenting with FMV technology to ape popular movies of the time, Sakamoto realised that less was more, and used minimalist sound design and atmospheric boss encounters to create a truly epic adventure. It was a trick that Shigeru Miyamoto would employ himself several years later with the release of *Starfox 64*.

IT'S ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST CINEMATIC GAMES OF THE 16-BIT PERIOD

Careful refinement was another success of Sakamoto's ambitious follow-up. Many of the weapons and abilities, as well as the locations that featured in *Super Metroid* had already been explored in *Metroid* eight years previously. Sakamoto purposely did this to make the game feel familiar to returning players. Although Sakamoto revisited certain aspects of the classic 8-bit game, he added plenty of fresh new ideas to his 16-bit follow-up, enough to make it stand proudly apart from its 8-bit baby brother.

Structurally, *Super Metroid* is immense, with beautiful level design and cleverly crafted areas that really do make you feel that you're exploring a huge alien world. Then there are all the subtle improvements like Samus' ability to fire in any direction while running, her handy new 'moonwalk' that allows her to fire while moving backwards, or the excellent grapple swing, which gave Samus even more freedom than she already had. *Super Metroid*, like *Doom* the year before it, proved that you didn't necessarily have to do things first in order to be memorable. You just had to present them in such a way that everyone else would simply follow suit. And follow suit they certainly did…



There are some epic bosses in *Super Metroid*, many of which are as tough to defeat as they are imposing.



It starts brilliantly with a frantic escape from a collapsing space station, and constantly cranks up the tension.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?



■ *SUPER METROID'S* success meant numerous clones quickly followed. Konami's *Castlevania* series is one of the most notable examples, with *Symphony Of The Night* delivering a similar formulae that would continue throughout the franchise's future – particularly on handhelds like the GBA and DS. Indie titles like *VVVVVV* and *Cave Story* also share DNA with *Super Metroid*, while Batman's *Arkham Asylum* takes a similar approach as well, ensuring that you are not able to reach certain areas of the island until you have the correct equipment.

And then of course there is the *Metroid* franchise itself. While it bypassed the N64, the franchise received a magnificent update on the GameCube in the forum of *Metroid Prime*. Several *Prime* sequels followed, and Nintendo also released two handheld titles (including a reboot of the original Metroid) for the GBA. The most recent effort *Metroid: Other M* is the closest the series has come to a remake of the original SNES classic.



ALSO RELEASED THIS YEAR…

EARTHWORM JIM

■ SHINY ENTERTAINMENT'S quirky platformer starring a space-suited annelid was a massive success. Full of variety and boasting exceptionally well-designed levels, its oddball sense of humour (cow launching) was perfectly complemented by imaginative character design and some truly glorious animation.

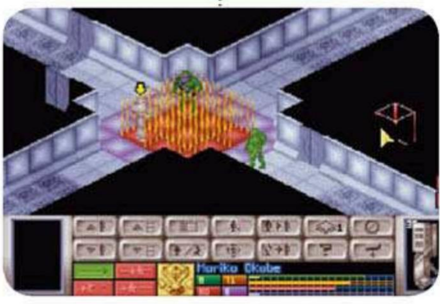


SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



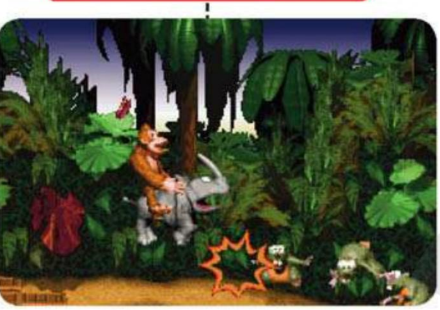
■ DESPITE THE original version shipping with some annoying bugs, the sequel to *Sensi* went on to become a huge critical hit for *Sensible Soccer*. In addition to including over 27,000 players, it boasted greatly improved controls, alongside an insanely deep career mode. It's quite simply one of the best football games of all time.

UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN



■ JULIAN GOLLOP was the undisputed king of the strategy genre on 8-bit systems. His first brand new IP for PCs was no different, and featured innovative new ideas, two distinct and oft copied viewpoints, along with an extremely immersive storyline. It's little wonder so much buzz is surrounding Firaxis' reboot.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



■ RARE'S FIRST *Donkey Kong* game was so impressive that many felt it was running on the (then unnamed) N64 when they first saw it announced at the trade shows. While tough in places, it's a highly enjoyable platformer with plenty of charm and humour and some truly stunning music. This was a very classic platformer.

SONIC & KNUCKLES



■ THIS INTERESTING experiment was originally supposed to be part of *Sonic 3*, but was changed to hit development deadlines. Released 10 months later, it featured Knuckles as a playable character, but also utilised a novel technique that allowed it to be hooked up to Sonic 3, 2 and 1 for additional content.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to collectable retro treasures



DETAILS

FORMAT: Mega Drive
YEAR: 1994
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-house
EXPECT TO PAY: £500+



EXHIBIT A: This is one of the rarest PAL Mega Drive games there is, only a handful of copies are known to exist.



EXHIBIT B: The Classic reissue version typically sells for around £15. The original goes for around 30 times that amount.



EXHIBIT C: Russell's copy is complete and in good condition, which you'd fully expect at a cost of £500.

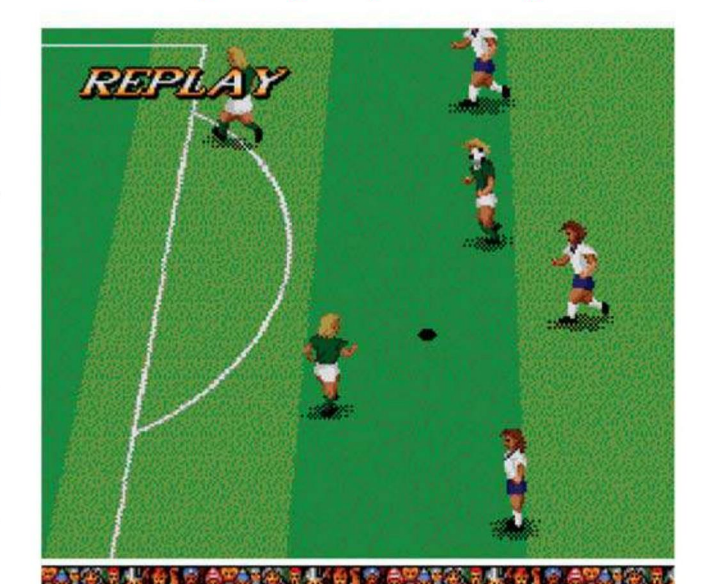
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER 2 BLUE BOX VERSION

If you'd like games™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner, email us at retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

WHY IT'S RARE

THOUGH COPIES of *World Championship Soccer 2* are easy to find in North America, where typically the game exchanges hands for a few dollars, the first edition of the European release is widely regarded as one of the rarest PAL Mega Drive titles, which is surprising as two different versions of the game were released for the console in the region. The repackaged SEGA Classic Collection version, which is fairly easy to obtain and can be picked up for around £15, and the original and much rarer first run 'blue box' version featured this month.

Released in small quantities and slipping completely under the radar on its release, rarely do blue box copies appear on trade and auction websites, and on those infrequent occasions they do they often fetch hundreds of pounds from collectors. But perhaps what is most unusual about the game is that it was selected by Sega to feature in its Mega Drive Classic Collection: a reissue series you would assume reserved for those titles that sold well on the console. When you consider just how scarce blue box copies are it's pretty clear this title didn't do big guns on its initial release.

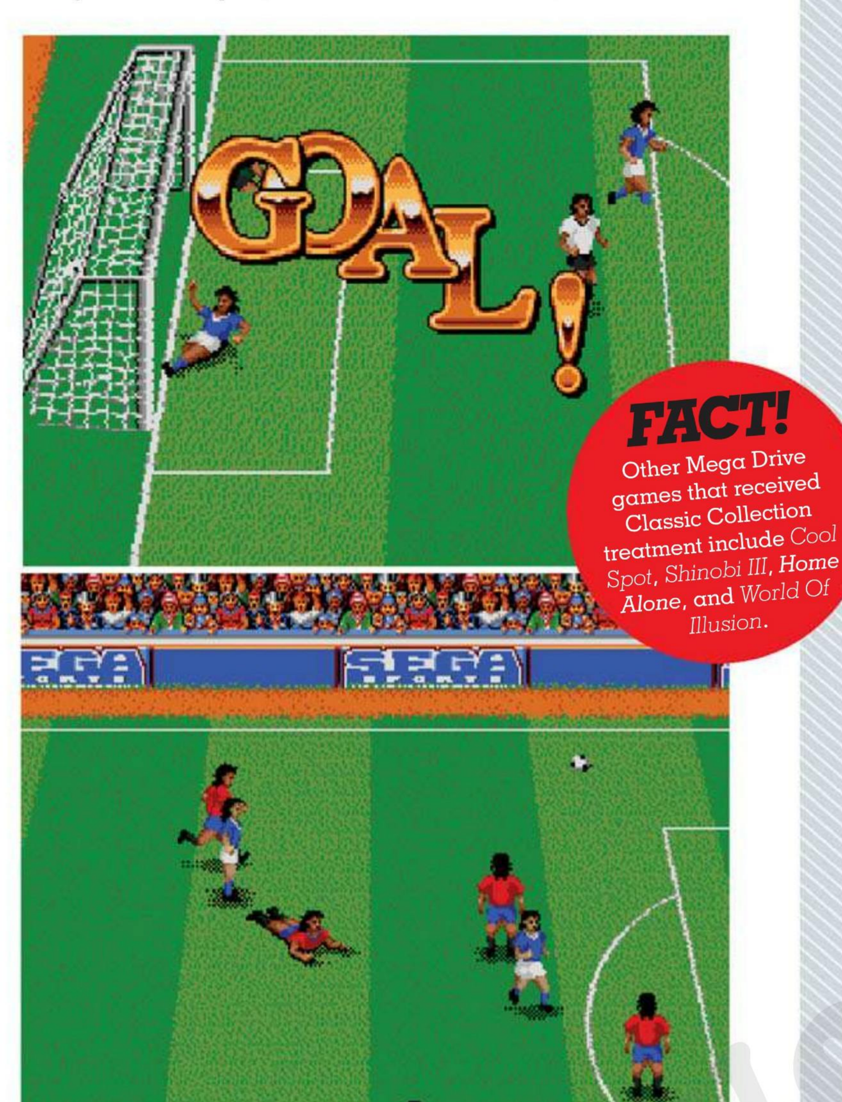




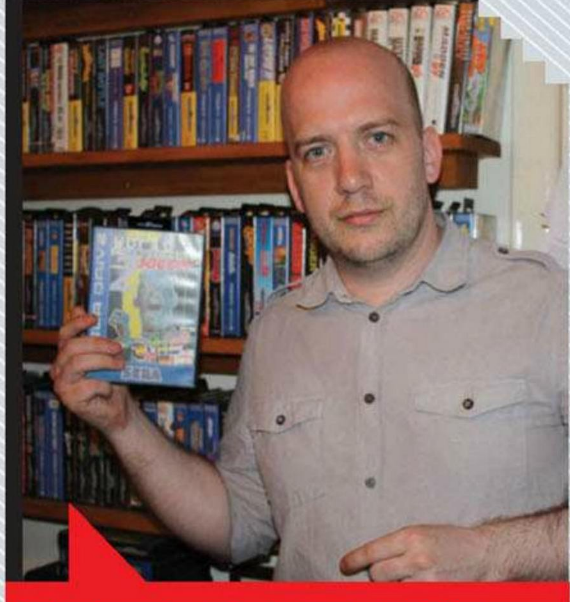
Worth Playing?

UNFORTUNATELY THE most valuable football game on Mega Drive isn't one of its best. While *World Championship Soccer 2's* menu and options do feel very FIFA-like, the similarities between the two games end there. Sega's game opts for a more arcade-style side-on perspective and doesn't have the same level of polish or playability. The players don't animate or pass the ball with any real fluidity, and they have a limited number of moves at their disposal too.

The game's overall presentation is also poor, with the teams all made up from the exact same single footballer sprite, one sporting a rather amusing Kevin Keegan-esque mullet. *WCS2* also has some of the most bizarre music we've heard in a sports game, and is possibly the only football game in existence (well, that we've played anyway) to not provide players with a clock during play. To find out how long of the match is left you have to pause the game. If this wasn't bizarre enough, you can also spend as long as you like taking thrown-ins, goal kicks and corners because the timer only seems to activate when the ball is in play. It's certainly one of the more unusual football games we've come across, that's for sure.



FACT!
Other Mega Drive games that received Classic Collection treatment include *Cool Spot*, *Shinobi III*, *Home Alone*, and *World Of Illusion*.



I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Russell Piper**
Occupation: **Risk Manager**

What is it about World Champion Soccer 2 and the Mega Drive in particular that is attractive to you as a collector?
I collect games for the Mega Drive as it was the first system I had as a child. I asked for a Master System for Christmas and I remember opening the present on Christmas Day and thinking "What on earth is this?". It was a Mega Drive, I did not even know it existed, I was ecstatic. I bought this game as I needed it to complete my collection.

Please tell us how/where you found the cart?
I would like to say I found it at a car boot for 10p but as with most rare games nowadays they wind up on the dreaded eBay. I purchased it from a Hungarian seller about a year ago.

What condition was the cart in and how much did you pay for it?
The cart, box and manual are all in perfect condition. I paid £500 for it and my wife is still making me suffer (rich coming from someone with enough designer handbags to make Naomi Campbell jealous!).

Do you actually play on the cart and, if so, what do you think of it?
I have played on it but as football games go on the Mega Drive it is pretty weak. Titles such as *Sensible Soccer* or *World Cup Italia 90* are much better.

Finally, would you ever consider selling the cart or is it yours for life?
I see my collection as an investment. I have two children who are five and three and I intend to sell everything in 12-15 years time which will hopefully make a dent in their university education.



The RETRO Guide To... Panzer Dragoon

If Panzer Dragoon was your kid, they'd be prepping for college now. As Sega's epochal Panzer Dragoon series approaches its 17th birthday, we wistfully look back at the series' lasting impact and influence with Panzer creator Yukio Futatsugi, and discuss what made Panzer so unique, the challenges the team faced, and a spiritual successor to Panzer Dragoon Saga

1995 – Panzer Dragoon



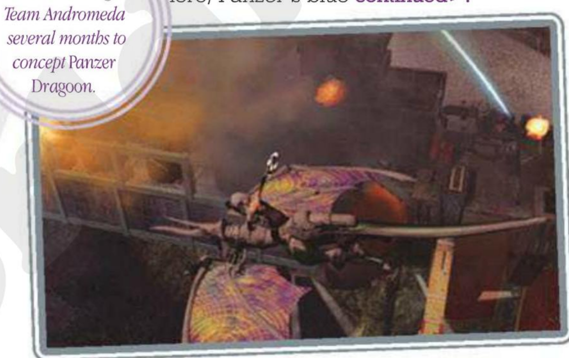
■ **ALTHOUGH IT BORE an unmistakable resemblance to Sega AM2's arcade classic, *Space Harrier*, Team Andromeda's inaugural effort for the Sega Saturn, *Panzer Dragoon*, became the system's killer app upon its release in 1995.** Forget the technically impressive yet ultimately hollow arcade-ports the Saturn was initially known for. *Panzer* was unlike anything else in gaming at the time. Windswept and soaring, the original *Panzer* unleashed its unique imagery, cinematic orchestral score, evocative CG interludes, and 'David and Goliath' themes on an adoring audience ready to leave the 16-bit era behind for good. Taking advantage of the Saturn's CD format to provide the redbook audio and CG-rendered cinemas, *Panzer Dragoon* offered the complete package. Although rail-shooters are by nature fairly brief (as opposed to role-playing games), Team Andromeda's blue dragon took players on a sophisticated audio-visual tour of what their new gaming system could do, providing eye-popping thrills along the way.

Series producer, Yukio Futatsugi, tells us how this came to be. "When I started making *Panzer Dragoon*, Sega's order was for me to make a new 3D shooting game. In the case of the Sega Saturn, Sega needed to release games in all genres because they didn't have a lot of third-party support, so we had to make sports, racing, shooting, fighting, RPG games. But there was no 3D shooter decided on yet. So *Panzer* began with me and Manabu Kusunoki [art lead]. In 3D shooters, people usually ride in some sort of 3D object, like a jet fighter. So our first question was 'What would be exciting for players to ride?'"

Ultimately it was decided that in lieu of battleships or jet fighters, the player would ride on a dragon, because a 3D dragon could allow for rich animations that inanimate objects like a jet could not. And with the Sega Saturn hardware still in development, Futatsugi and Kusunoki had just a few months just to nail down the visual style and mythology of the *Panzer* world.

One defining element of *Panzer*'s appeal is its visual design. A far cry from the nerdish, whiskered dragons of *D&D* lore, *Panzer*'s blue continued>.

The delay of the Saturn bought Team Andromeda several months to concept Panzer Dragoon.





and white armoured protagonist (effectively the game's main character) echoed post-modern cool, right in line with many of Japan's classic sci-fi tropes at the time: barren, ruined civilizations, and humankind on the ropes. "We decided that the armour style of the *Panzer Dragoon* world and the ruins would have the look of white shell. The dragons would have white armour, the Empire's battleships are covered in white armour, the ruins are covered in white shell. This was the basic image we decided on over the course of that three months before we started development."

At first glance it would seem that bits of *Nausicaä* or *Gundam* or Ghibli's *Laputa* informed *Panzer*'s polygonal world, but the biggest influence came from an old science fiction novel that Futatsugi read while in school. "The first basic influence was a science-fiction novel called *The Long Afternoon Of Earth*, written by Brian Aldiss, a book that I read in elementary school. In it, the Earth had begun to die because the Sun was dying, and the planet's rotation had stopped. One side was always hot, the other side was always cold, and human life was in ruins. That sort of theme was popular in Japanese animation and sci-fi."

Another element that bears notice is the game's orchestral score. Work began on the soundtrack after the game was completed, to emulate the Hollywood process. "*Panzer Dragoon* is a rail shooter, and the player speed is the same throughout the whole game," he tells us. "So we could use music that was specifically designed to the level. In the case of movies, they make the movies and visuals first, and then the composer makes the soundtrack according to the finished film. I wanted to do it in the same way. In the past, game music was just background music, so I asked the composers to make the music after we finished the level design and arrange it to the game events."

Zwei's growth system was used partly to add variety but also in preparation for Panzer Dragoon Saga.


Sega needed to release games in all genres because they didn't have a lot of third-party support



It took three years to develop Panzer Dragoon Saga, making it the most ambitious Saturn game.

The final, least-discussed detail that really brought the whole *Panzer* concept together was the naming process. It was Futatsugi's idea to go with the Germanic convention for the game name (which became even more pronounced with its sequel). With militaristic overtones ('Panzer' in German means 'tank'), the young Futatsugi immediately rescued the series from a lifetime of horrible dragon clichés by juxtaposing the tough, sturdy sound of the German language on his Japanese team's efforts. "Yeah, it was my idea. Basically, Japanese otaku like German words and language because it's so cool. It sounds stronger than English words or Japanese words, so I wanted to use it."

1995 – *Panzer Dragoon R-Zone*



■ IF YOU WERE one of the unfortunate few who ever owned Tiger's unsuccessful 'R-Zone' handheld gaming system, you may remember *Panzer Dragoon R-Zone*; a licensed, cartridge-based product bearing little resemblance to the *Panzer Dragoon* we all know and love. It was so bad, it's best left forgotten. So let's move on…

1996 – *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*



■ NOW THAT THE hard work of establishing the mythology, creating the technical tools, and designing the basic game system was complete, Team Andromeda immediately began work on *Panzer*'s sequel as soon as they had shipped the first game. In fact, not only did it begin work on what would eventually become *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, but thanks to the support and encouragement of Futatsugi's boss, Yoji Ishii, Team Andromeda simultaneously began laying the groundwork for *Panzer*



Saturn's immense 2D power, was responsible for the long stretching plains and seas of the levels.

Dragoon Saga – an efficient technique almost unheard of in game development at the time, and a style that Hollywood would eventually adopt while filming big budget movie sequels back-to-back.

For *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* ('Zwei' being German for 'two'), Team Andromeda was able to absorb the feedback from both the fans and various international divisions at Sega to improve upon the basic concept. To be honest, as memorable as the original *Panzer Dragoon* was, *Zwei* outclasses it in almost every way (the soundtrack being, perhaps, slightly less soul-stirring). Visually, the game added lusher textures, smoother 3D models, more fluid animations, and an improved camera system. Feature-wise, *Zwei* offered a rather more forgiving learning curve, branching paths (!), a dragon-evolution system (!!), and, best of all, Pandora's Box (!!!), an 'omake' treasure chest laden with a wealth of unlockable bonus content. But the most immediately striking thing about *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* – which was actually a prequel to the first *Panzer* – is that you begin the game on foot; specifically on your dragon's feet.

Designed to try and bring the player 'closer' to his reptilian ward, *Zwei*'s opening chapter finds players strapped to the back of a fledgling dragon whose wings are not yet strong enough to fly. As it trundles along, it's hard not to feel a parental instinct kick in as you fear for the pup's safety. This much is clearly expressed in the game's opening cinema, which reveals a society where dragons are feared and summarily slaughtered before they reach maturity. This particular dragon, however, gets a second chance.

Futatsugi explains, "At first, the dragon you play as in *Zwei* can only run, and not fly. The second stage is where you first experience flight on your dragon; that idea came from our team. That's the best point in the game, in my opinion, where you first take flight. There's only silence, no music, and just flying. That feature is the best in all of *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, I think. To make branching paths, however, was very hard, because we had to make twice as many paths and game assets. But we didn't want players to only have one path."

According to Futatsugi it was actually Sega of America that suggested the branching path system to Team Andromeda. This was but one of the moves the team made to address criticisms of the first game that – being an on-rails shooter – the game experience was altogether too short-lived to provide lasting value. Having already extended *Zwei*'s replay value exponentially via the branching paths, Team Andromeda added a system to reflect the benefits of player choice: the growth system.

"We wanted players to play *Zwei* many, many times, so we included growth situations that continued>.

BRANCHING PATHS

FIVE GAMES THAT SHARE PANZER DRAGOON'S DNA

Panzer Dragoon Genos



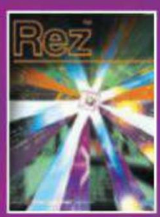
■ IN 2003, after the release of *Orta*, a couple of guys from a German *Panzer Dragoon* fansite 'leaked' a video of some off-screen video footage supposedly captured from an internal Sega presentation. The combination of moody CG imagery, brooding overtones, and a healthy amount of Sega logos conspired to form a believable trailer that had some fans convinced this was the next entry into the *Panzer* series. Unfortunately it was merely a hoax, highlighting the unfortunate fact that fans were more interested in continuing the series than Sega was.

Panzer Dragoon AGES 2500 Vol. 27



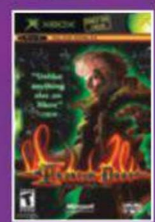
■ PART OF Sega's 'AGES' (Sega backwards, check it out!) series of recreated retro games, this re-release featured the original *Panzer Dragoon* in various re-rezzed forms on PS2, adding a host of archival bonus material and interviews. This is a good game to add to one's *Panzer* collection if wheeling out the old Saturn is too much of a hassle.

Rez



■ ALTHOUGH NOT directly related to *Panzer Dragoon* beyond Katsumi Yokota serving as lead artist on both games (developer United Game Artists also shared a few ex-Team Andromeda members), you can see *Panzer*'s influence on *Rez* in the third-person perspective, the dual arsenal of laser and lock-on shot, and on-rails shooting action. Although *Rez* producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi would state that *Panzer* wasn't really an influence on his game, you can clearly see the DNA and legacy of Sega's dragons (along with *Space Harrier*) in this psychedelic mash-up of techno and shooting.

Phantom Dust



■ BELIEVE IT or not, this '*PD*' game featuring human characters ("Espers") wielding psychic powers (and created by *Panzer* producer, Yukio Futatsugi, while he was studio manager at Microsoft Game Studios Japan) almost featured humans riding creatures again, like giant dragons, lions, and snakes. However, since MGS had requested that Sega create a new *Panzer* for Xbox (*Orta*), Futatsugi and his team decided to move in another direction. Random fact: *Phantom Dust*'s battle system was indirectly influenced by *Goldeneye 007* on N64.

TEAM ANDROMEDA: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Yukio Futatsugi

■ *PANZER* SERIES' producer Futatsugi went on to work at Microsoft Game Studios, creating *Phantom Dust* there before leaving after a number of years to establish his own development studio, Grounding Inc., with former United Game Artist alumnus, Mineko Okamura. In addition to *Crimson Dragon*, the studio is responsible for a number of Nintendo-related products.



Katsumi Yokota

■ AFTER TEAM Andromeda disbanded, Yokota [lead artist and character designer on *Panzer Dragoon Saga*] joined Sega's United Game Artists, as art director and lead artist on the universally acclaimed title, *Rez*. When UGA was absorbed into Sonic Team, Yokota left Sega along with *Rez* producer, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, and *Rez* programmer Osamu Kodera, to form Q Entertainment. Their first effort together under this banner was the milestone puzzle game, *Lumines*.



Kentaro Yoshida

■ ALTHOUGH ANOTHER team [Smilebit] would go on to create *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, Yoshida was one of the original core Team Andromeda members who would work on the game. His later work would include contributions to the *Ape Escape* series, as well as some high-profile Microsoft Xbox 360 RPGs, but since 2007 his primary body of work has been guiding the *Pixeljunk* series out of Q-Games in Kyoto.



Manabu Kusunoki

■ THE ORIGINAL dragon designer and art director of *Panzer Dragoon*, Kusunoki would later, as a member of Artoon, work on games such as *Pinobee*, and *Blinx The Time Sweeper*. When Artoon, along with development studios Cavia and Feelplus, were absorbed into parent company, AQ Interactive, he would contribute to *Blue Dragon*, and *The Last Story*. He created the concept art for *Crimson Dragon*.

Tomohiro Kondo

■ *PANZER DRAGOON*'s original producer and the director of *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, Kondo is now a member of Land Ho! (which, coincidentally, developed the AGES 2500 port of *Panzer Dragoon*), a Tokyo-based development studio that has, among other things, developed the *We Cheer, Just Dance*, and *Dragon Blade* games for Wii. On *Crimson Dragon*, Kondo returns to familiar territory as its lead game designer.



"I think that the director of Drag-On Dragoon played a lot of Panzer Dragoon", says Futatsugi.

Ultimately, even with all of the content packed into Zwei, Team Andromeda found a way to add even more

players could see," we're told. "We thought players would want to play one more time, if they discovered many different ways to grow. This way it would feel like the dragon was a living creature. In the case of the first *Panzer Dragoon* we could have put different dragons in, but players might not have seen it since they might be satisfied by only playing one time. But with branching paths and growth styles in *Zwei*, we thought most people would play multiple times. And since we were working on *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, we also needed a growth system for that, so it helped that we started it on *Zwei*."

In addition to the refinements and enhancements on offer was an overhauled graphics engine that really made the concept gel. The team had clearly gotten to grips with what the Saturn could do visually, wrapping their character models and environments in richer textures, while stages were no longer barren, instead often overcrowded with foliage – the forest scene with the giant ape/insect/horse-like boss comes to mind. But it was really the 'water stage' that provided the game's eye-popping visual moment. Taking advantage of the Saturn's ability to wield large scrolling bitmaps, Team Andromeda layered and scaled these bitmaps to create effects that would have been impossible on the rival PlayStation. The other benefit to this technology was the ability to create landscapes (or, lakescapes) that extended infinitely into the distance with no additional effort.

Ultimately, even with all of the content packed into *Zwei*, Team Andromeda found a way to add even more: Pandora's Box. The virtual ribbon on top of a game packed with riches, Pandora's Box was the brainchild of *Panzer*'s lead programmer, Junichi Sutou, who in his free time managed to pack unlockable dragons, a *Space Harrier* mode, special shot effects, a double-speed mode and more into *Zwei*. And to think gamers today are satisfied with achievements. "This was the work of the main programmer, Sutou-san," says Futatsugi. "He's now lead programmer at Land Ho! [development team working on Grounding's *Crimson Dragon*], but he was lead programmer on *Panzer Dragoon* and *Zwei*. Whenever he had spare time he would always make something new, so he'd say, "Please come take a look at this." So when I saw this content I knew I wanted to add it to the game. We did *Zwei* in ten to eleven months, so we really didn't have the benefit of planning out all of the things we wanted to put into the game beyond the main features. But Team Andromeda made a lot of things happen purely by instinct. A lot of development teams will sit around



An inspiring anime was "Galleon, where you discover lost robots of the past", says Futatsugi.

and wait for instructions, but Andromeda took the initiative to go ahead and do the things it thought would be fun."

In hindsight, *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* was clearly a model of development efficiency, and should be regarded as a textbook example of one of gaming's finest sequels; improving both the game experience, and sheer, joyous replayability.



1996 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini*

■ IF YOU THOUGHT *Panzer Dragoon Saga* saw limited release, it's nothing compared to the very difficult to find Game Gear entry to the series. Developed by another team entirely, *Panzer Dragoon Mini* was a spin-off to the main series that only saw release in Japan for Sega's handheld system. Perfunctory, forgettable, and featuring a 'super-deformed' version of the original game's blue dragon, *Mini* is the first (and only) *Panzer* game to feature a riderless dragon. For serious *Panzer* collectors only.



1998 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga*

■ THANKS TO AN unfortunate combination of 1) being an excellent game, and 2) being produced in painfully limited numbers and 3) at the tail end of a console's lifespan, the Saturn's most renowned RPG, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, has only increased in reputation in the 14 or so years since it first debuted. Consider how many ways in which you could, if you wanted, play *Final Fantasy IV*. Now consider the same for *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. You can play it one way: on the Sega Saturn. The game isn't nearly as hard to find in its native Japan, but if you want to play an English-language variant of Saga, and don't yet own it, prepare to shell out big bucks, because unless someone makes an effective commercial emulator for the Saturn, this is the only way you'll ever get to play it.

In development for three years, the first year of which was primarily planning and preparation done in parallel to *Zwei*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* added a new member to the fold: Katsumi Yokota, who would create the beautiful, memorable, and iconic artwork for the game. Yokota, who would go on to become the lead artist on Sega's *Rez*, brought a distinctly different style to *Saga*. Painterly, otherworldly – many words can be used to describe the art he created, especially in regards to the game's main characters, Edge and Azel. While the artwork was clearly in capable hands, Futatsugi and his team had other problems: No one on the team had ever made a role-playing game before.



Futatsugi didn't work on Panzer Dragoon Mini, so has nothing to say about the Game Gear title.

"When I finished the story for *Zwei*, I began working on *Saga*'s story, but it was very hard to create," Futatsugi remembers, "because Sega didn't have any internal RPG developers, so we didn't know how to make RPGs very well. I think since no one knew how to make an RPG, that actually allowed us to make *Panzer Dragoon RPG* because we had a fresh perspective and nothing holding us back. *Panzer Dragoon* Saga had full voice acting, it was a full 3D RPG, and we made all of the game movies using character models."

"It definitely wasn't easy to develop. Since it was our first time making an RPG, we didn't know the best methods to tell the story. So we used real 3D scenes with character models, instead of [common RPG technique] using flat 2D character art and text boxes. But we didn't realize how hard it was to accomplish this. No one on the team knew how difficult it would be to create that much voice acting, render over 90 minutes of real-time 3D scenes. We just thought "Let's do this!""

The growing pains involved with *Saga*'s development led to development falling behind schedule, and rising budget costs. By the continued>.





time the game shipped in 1998, the Saturn was all but buried by Sony's PlayStation, with most retailers having re-allocated shelf space once reserved for Saturn games to PlayStation and N64 games. This led to small print runs of the game, making it very difficult to find once it was finally released. Don't expect the game to ever hit Virtual Console, either. According to Futatsugi, an internal power struggle between department heads at Sega, combined with *Saga*'s inflated budget and lukewarm sales of the game resulted in the series being put to rest until the series' revival some years later on Xbox. No one knows what happened to the original code, though it has been suggested that it may have even been sadly discarded in the resulting management clash.

It's a shame, really, because *Saga* does live up to the hype. It's a different, solitary type of RPG, though, practically the polar opposite to something like *Chrono Cross* and its dozens of characters. In *Saga*, you pretty much see the game world through the lens of Edge, the main protagonist, and then Azel, who is at first his nemesis, and later his trusted friend. The game system, which is a hybrid of turn-based/real-time battle (complete with on-the-fly dragon morphing -- itself an expanded version of *Zwei*'s growth system) was unlike anything else in the late Nineties glut of JRPGs. Plus, it was infinitely cooler to travel through the game riding dragonback.

While the dragons of Panzer Dragoon are like weapons, those in Crimson Dragon are more like alien creatures.

Sega didn't realise it at the time, but it had unwittingly created a modern role-playing masterpiece

It's true that *Saga*'s reputation may be enhanced somewhat by its rarity, but it truly is a special game that takes players on a mysterious, evocative, four-disc journey. Like the games before it, *Saga* ends with a moment of sacrifice, this time seemingly taking the main character, Edge, with it alongside the dragon. But in the very final scene we glimpse a shrouded Azel embarking on a quest to find her friend.

Emotional. Sombre. The benefit of having so few characters to care about, as opposed to an entourage of cohorts, really reveals itself by game's end. Sega didn't seem to realise it at the time, but it had unwittingly created a modern role-playing masterpiece. One can only hope they find the master data in a locker somewhere.

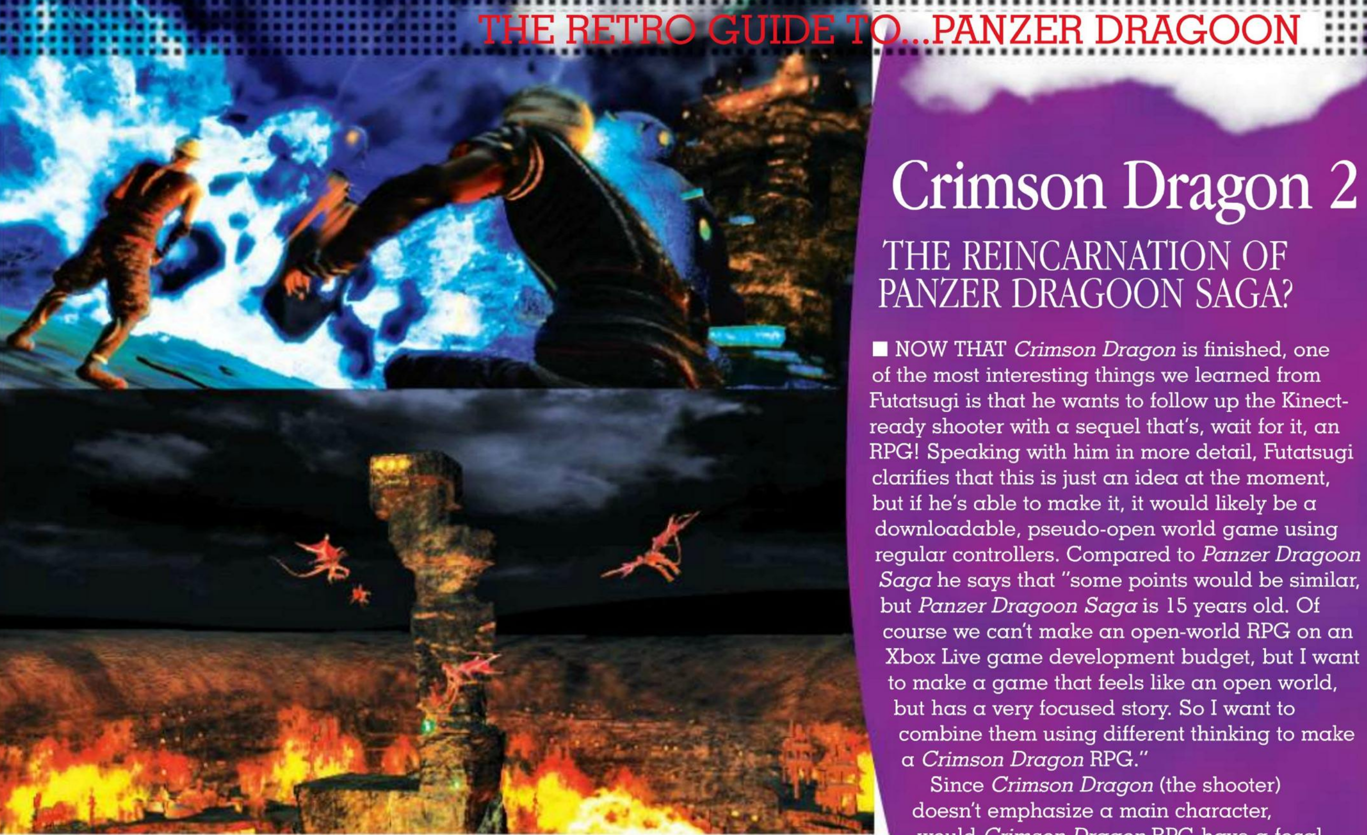
One final titbit from Futatsugi: "A lot of the developers who made *Panzer Dragoon* went on to form the *Shenmue* team, so *Shenmue*'s camera system was taken from *Panzer Dragoon*." As much as we love *Shenmue*, it's disproportionately more enjoyable to fly around blasting warships out of the sky than it is walking slowly around China looking for a game of Lucky Hit.



2002 – *Panzer Dragoon Orta*

A NEW CONSOLE launch is regarded as the perfect place to either introduce new franchises or reboot older ones. Although the length of time between *Panzer Dragoon Saga* and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* wasn't especially long, the leap in visual quality seemed like light years. Since Team Andromeda had long since disbanded following the

With most of Team Andromeda scattered, it's unlikely that Sega will ever make a new Panzer.



release of *Saga, Orta* was created by one of Sega's new, boutique, internal development teams: Smilebit. Picking up years after the conclusion of *Saga*, the titular *Orta* (spoiler alert) is ultimately revealed to be the child of Azel and Edge. Speaking with Futatsugi, who was uninvolved with the development of *Orta*, he says that his intention with *Saga*'s ending was that Edge really died, and that Azel's quest would come to nothing. But since that was never explicitly explained in the game itself, the team behind *Orta* took the opportunity to create a true next-generation *Panzer Dragoon*.

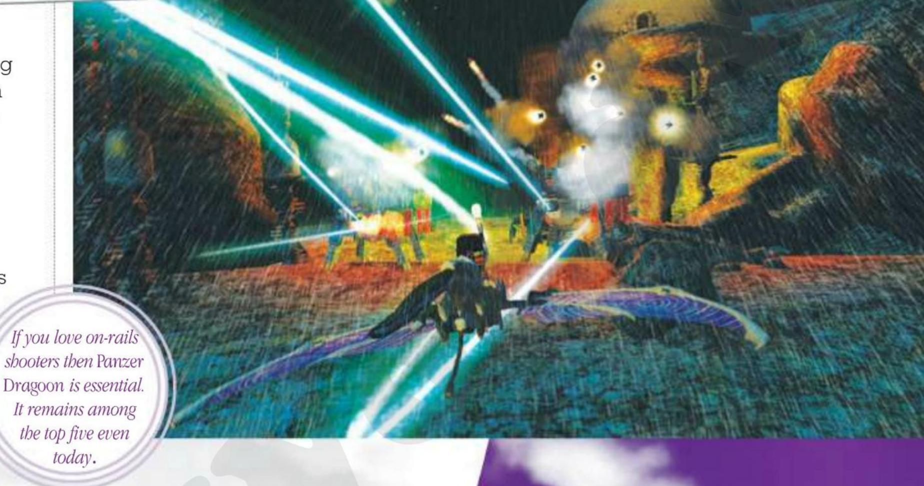
A return to the on-rails shooter approach of the first two games, *Orta* single-handedly took the series from overachieving underdog to overpowered hotshot. Instead of having to work miracles to make a 3D game run on the Sega Saturn, Smilebit utilized the horsepower of the then-most powerful console hardware: the Xbox. No special tricks were needed to make things pop on screen. Nope. Now everything was gorgeous, and to this day still looks practically timeless, with beautiful visuals and character design. For hardcore *Panzer* fans it was a mixed blessing. On the one hand it was wonderful to have the series back, but at the same time it wasn't being made by Team Andromeda. As beautiful as it was, it felt a little different. Kind of like Guns N' Roses with only Fat Axl as an original member. Still, the game was well made, featured a stiff difficulty curve in line with the original *Panzer*, and also featured its own Pandora's Box full of secrets (including the entire, original *Panzer Dragoon* as an unlockable bonus). Based on its own merits, *Orta* is a worthy addition to the series, and holds up today, but for whatever reason some of the spark felt missing, overwhelmed, perhaps, by the most cutting-edge visual effects of the day.

Crimson Dragon 2

THE REINCARNATION OF PANZER DRAGOON SAGA?

■ NOW THAT *Crimson Dragon* is finished, one of the most interesting things we learned from Futatsugi is that he wants to follow up the Kinect-ready shooter with a sequel that's, wait for it, an RPG! Speaking with him in more detail, Futatsugi clarifies that this is just an idea at the moment, but if he's able to make it, it would likely be a downloadable, pseudo-open world game using regular controllers. Compared to *Panzer Dragoon Saga* he says that "some points would be similar, but *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is 15 years old. Of course we can't make an open-world RPG on an Xbox Live game development budget, but I want to make a game that feels like an open world, but has a very focused story. So I want to combine them using different thinking to make a *Crimson Dragon* RPG."

Since *Crimson Dragon* (the shooter) doesn't emphasize a main character, would *Crimson Dragon* RPG have a focal character like *Saga*'s main character, Edge? "Because *Crimson Dragon* was designed as a multiplayer game, we couldn't have a single character focus. But in *Crimson Dragon* RPG we would have a strong main character," Futatsugi says. "In the shooter, players learn about the world and who the enemies are. If I make a '*Crimson Dragon Saga*' it would directly connect to the ending of the first *Crimson Dragon*. The shooter is just a prologue to the bigger story. So if you want to see a *Crimson Dragon* RPG, you should get the original *Crimson Dragon* so you can see the story. And if I make a *Crimson Dragon* RPG, I don't think it'll have turn-based battles. It'll be like the original shooter with action-RPG elements."

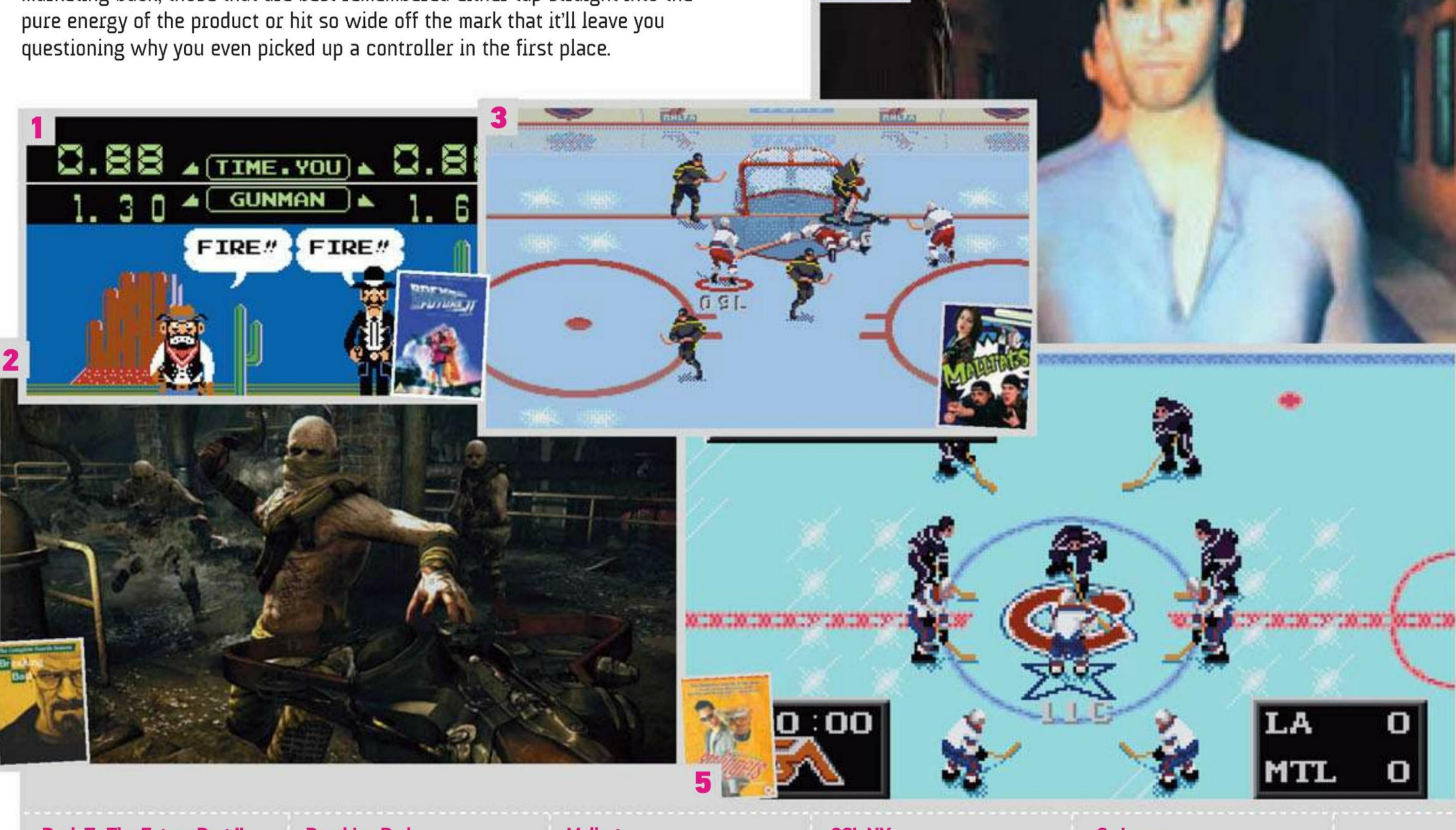


If you love on-rails shooters then Panzer Dragoon *is essential. It remains among the top five even today.*

ESSENTIALS

10 NOTABLE VIDEOGAME APPEARANCES IN TV & FILM

■ Whether they have been wedged into the frame by imprudent product placement or included out of love, videogames have made several noteworthy appearances in visual media over the years. Usually included for a quick marketing buck, those that are best remembered either tap straight into the pure energy of the product or hit so wide off the mark that it'll leave you questioning why you even picked up a controller in the first place.



Back To The Future Part II
Game: Wild Gunman
Year: 1989

1 The makers of *Back To The Future Part II* seriously overestimated the lasting appeal of Nintendo light gun game *Wild Gunman*. When Marty McFly stumbles into retro Eighties' café in the year 2015, he giddily discovers an arcade cabinet replica of the NES Wild West shooter. McFly's enthusiasm is swiftly undercut by a doe-eyed Elijah Wood, dismissing the retro title with "you mean you have to use your hands? That's like a baby's toy!" Proof positive there that Kinect will transform all our youth into ungrateful little shits.

Breaking Bad
Game: Rage
Year: 2011

2 You wouldn't expect id Software's post-apocalyptic shooter to appear in the utterly sublime drama series *Breaking Bad*, but it did just that in the show's brooding fourth season. Highlighting the post-traumatic stress of recovering drug addict Jesse, the character spends the opening of an episode playing *Rage* incorrectly with a light gun, while having nightmarish visions of a previous misdemeanour. It's a rare case of a first-person shooter actually conveying raw emotion and dramatic depth.

Mallrats
Game: NHL All-Star Hockey
Year: 1995

3 Kevin Smith has a renowned love of ice hockey. He also has a love of retro ice-hockey games. *Mallrats* referenced Smith's great passion for the pixelled replica of the sport, with Jason Lee's Brodie dismissing his girlfriend's breakfast plans ("Breakfast? Breakfast, schmrekfest") in favour of finishing his current match. Trivia: while Lee is playing Sega's *NHL All-Star Hockey*, the sound effects in fact originate from the EA series of licensed games, which Smith actually preferred.

CSI: NY
Game: Second Life
Year: 2007

4 It takes a certain amount of baffling ineptitude or innate loathing of your audience (or perhaps both) to so erroneously misrepresent a videogame in the way *CSI* did with *Second Life*. Forget nonsense they spout about "I'll ping her IP" to track a suspect over the internet, the episode in question features a sequence where Gary Sinise's cop chases a blue fox through the life simulator. Why doesn't the suspect just disconnect from the server to avoid questioning? Just another case of *CSI* feigning an understanding of modern technology. Yeeeeaaah!

Swingers
Game: NHL Hockey 94
Year: 1996

5 Another Hockey reference; this time courtesy of *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau and when-he-was-funny Vince Vaughn in Swingers. Playing *NHL Hockey 94*, the two discuss the controversial removal of fights in the sequel. "I wish they still had fights in this game, so I could bitch slap Wayne," says Vaughn's Trent. "Why'd they get rid of the fighting? It was the best part of the old version," responds Favreau's Mike, echoing the thoughts of thousands of incensed gamers in the Nineties.



The Wizard
Game: Super Mario Bros. 3
Year: 1989

6 This was it if you were a child in the Eighties. Well, if you were an American child in the Eighties. The Wizard was like the *Rocky* of bubblegum cinema; a tale of trials and tribulations saturated with Nintendo products. The whole grubby marketing cesspit culminates in a videogame tournament featuring *Ninja Gaiden* and ending with the (unreleased at the time) *Super Mario Bros. 3*. In the dark days before the internet, this preview of the classic *Mario* sequel was enough to pack out theatres, but everyone involved really should feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World
Game: Various Nintendo games
Year: 2010

7 It spends the majority of its running time severely over-egging the hipster pudding, but there's no resisting the subtlety and charm in which it references classic videogames. From the use of the Great Fairy Fountain theme in a dream sequence, to name-checking a multitude of Nintendo games and characters (Sex Bob-omb, Clash At Demonhead). A great amount of 8-bit love is coursing through Pilgrim's veins. Now if only Scott himself wasn't such an insufferable dullard.

Spaced
Game: Resident Evil 2
Year: 1999

8 The groundbreaking television series attributed to thrusting geek culture into the mainstream (mainstream being the 9pm Friday night slot on Channel 4) was awash with gaming references. Several episodes feature the nonchalant Tim (Simon Pegg) indulging in some PlayStation action, but the most memorable moment belongs to his *Resident Evil 2* obsession. It's in one particularly effective hallucinogenic scene involving Capcom's classic that inspired Pegg and director Edgar Wright to pen *Shaun Of The Dead*. Now there's a slice of fried gold!

Reign Over Me
Game: Shadow Of The Colossus
Year: 2007

9 It first appears odd that Team Ico's *Shadow Of The Colossus* features so prominently in the post-9/11 drama starring Adam Sandler. Yet its inclusion is no doubt one of the most mature and intelligent uses of a videogame on film. Sandler's Charlie uses the game as a way to revisit the grief of his wife and children that died in the 11 September terrorist attacks, with the theme of falling giants enabling Charlie to indirectly address his issues. It's a rare moment of understated glory for the industry: Hollywood finally understanding the dramatic power of the medium.

South Park
Game(s): World Of Warcraft, Rock Band **Year:** 2007

10 South Park has offended everyone, yet the foul-mouthed fourth graders have an affection for their videogame pastime. With Cartman time travelling to get the Nintendo Wii early, Peter Moore yelling at the kids to "get the fuck out of my office" and the contemporary rock and roll story interpreted through *Rock Band*, Trey Parker and Matt Stone have an ingenious understanding of the gaming community. Special kudos to the *World Of Warcraft* episode, where the boys must defeat a griefer named Jenkins; it ridicules the stereotype of your average *WOW* player, and celebrates everything that makes the MMO so enrapturing.


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DIGITAL REVOLUTION

RIGHT TO RESELL

>> New EU laws outline a potential future in second-hand digital sales





DIGITAL GAMES: YOUR RIGHT TO RESELL

The European Court of Justice rules in favour of the used sales of both physical and digital media. But what does this mean for the industry? **games™** *investigates the repercussions of the edict*

THE THORNY ISSUE surrounding the sale of second-hand software has now received the firm backing of the European Court of Justice, validating the resale of both downloaded and physical software by the consumer. The ruling stemmed from the court case between software giant Oracle and German company UsedSoft, wherein Oracle attempted to quash UsedSoft from selling used licences of the developer's software.

With judgment falling in favour of UsedSoft, it now underlines the legality of a consumer's rights to resell a product after it has been purchased from the retailer. As the ruling states, software developers and publishers "cannot oppose" purchased media – whether a physical product or a digital download – from being resold, superseding any End User Licence Agreement that may have been signed.

That last point is a particularly sore one for copyright holders distributing digital goods. Most consumers will have blithely signed a EULA or two when completing a digital purchase in the past, and these pseudo-contracts often prohibit the customer from selling their digital copy second-hand. As the result of the court case overturns this stipulation, software developers will now have to strategically rethink how they limit the second-hand sales of their products.



"An author of software cannot oppose the resale of his 'used' licences allowing the use of his programs downloaded from the internet," the ruling extrapolates. "The copyright holder's distribution right is exhausted on the occasion of the first sale in the European Union by that rightholder, or with his consent, of any copy, tangible or intangible, of his computer program."

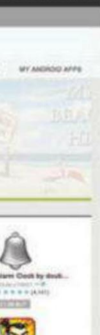
One of the most contentious issues currently surrounding the industry, publishers already have measures firmly in place to deter used game sales – the EA and Ubisoft-supported Online Pass is one particularly effective means to both discourage consumers and spin revenue from second-hand sales. This won't change any time soon, as the ruling stipulates that, while the exclusive rights to distribute the software are "exhausted" once the consumer has purchased the product, the right of reproduction remains with the developer.

WHILE THE VERDICT states that the consumer has the right to resell any digital purchases, as long as they render the original copy "unusable" at the point of sale – so you can't duplicate the disc or leave the original installed on your machine – there's still a risk of further expanding piracy. It's therefore unlikely that publishers and developers will lay unyielding trust in the consumer's moral compass, so it's only a matter of time before publishers react efficiently to the latest news.

Valve's Steam service may be strangely prescient, already offering consumers the ability to trade downloaded games

The ruling may result in stores such as the App Store and Google Play being forced to include a resell feature.





through the Steam Trading function. Here, Steam users can swap games for a price that both parties deem acceptable, whether swapping a game for another or a particularly sought-after in-game item. It may set a rudimentary template for other developers and publishers to follow suit. At the present, services such as the PSN Store, Xbox Live Marketplace and Apple App Store don't offer a similar means for users to trade their digital purchases. But with the legality of the issue now certifying the action, these stores may be forced into a situation where the option will have to be readily available to consumers.

IF THEY MISS this window, there's every opportunity for a third-party company to find itself dominating in an untapped marketplace. It's still unclear whether the ramifications of this legal battle will change the way games are delivered to systems, but it's not all doom-and-gloom for publishers yet.

It would be unfeasible for XBLA and PSN to be redistributed through other clients; therefore, it's not so much a case of 'if' but 'when'. These two publishers will have to create some verifiable legal avenues via which gamers can trade and purchase second-hand titles; hopefully Sony and Microsoft will find a lucrative business model that services the needs of both the consumer and the publisher.

It would certainly offset some of the financial losses suffered over the years through physical used game sales. However, it's clients such as Steam and Origin that stand to benefit substantially from this new ruling with the right service implemented into their existing interfaces. Major publishers could also theoretically appease the unabating second-hand sales market by offering used titles at a discounted monetary value.

> "An author of software cannot oppose the resale of his 'used' licences downloaded from the internet"
> EU Court

It remains to be seen if EA's Origin or Valve's Steam will take advantage of this new ruling in the EU and it's likely that now the relevant parties are formulating plans to riposte the European Court of Justice's ruling. But where things get particularly complicated – and where the industry's gaze will likely focus on – is how Apple's App Store and Android's Google Play marketplaces will respond. With the ownership of software after purchase established as being with the consumer, these two closed-off stores may have to completely overhaul the way transactions are made to facilitate second-hand trading.

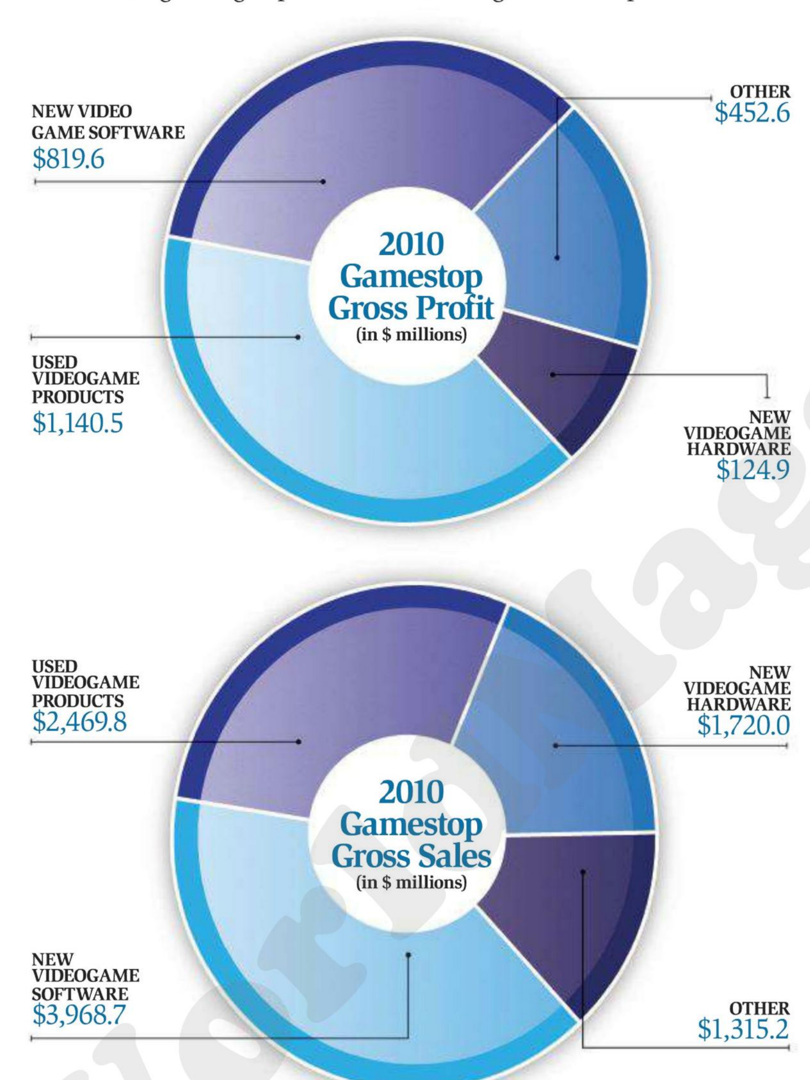
It will be some time before the full effect of this new legal ruling reverberates down to a consumer level. But as the industry evolves to emphasise a digital future, it not only underlines the true ownership of media, but also suggests a feasible way for publishers to control the second-hand sales issue.



Publishers have employed measures to deter consumers from physical second-hand sales.

SECOND-HAND SALES IN NUMBERS

As the industry continues to struggle to gain a firm grip on second-hand videogame sales, the figures released in 2011 from GameStop emphasise the growing importance of the used game marketplace



A MOMENT WITH…

LOOT DROP

KEY FIGUREHEADS:

- John Romero
- Brenda Garno Brathwaite
- Tom Hall

GAME HIGHLIGHTS





>> Ghost Recon Commander [Facebook]



>> Pettington Park [Google+]

>> A superstar team, Loot Drop is comprised of id Software veterans John Romero and Tom Hall, as well as board game and RPG designer Brenda Brathwaite. At Loot Drop, the team has put its expertise to the task of designing the next generation of social games, the first of which is Ghost Recon Commander. Brathwaite joins us to discuss it…



BRENDA GARNO BRATHWAITE
GAME DESIGNER

Your background in game design ranges from deep RPGs to intellectual board games and more mainstream videogames. Do you adopt a different frame of mind for each sort of game you develop?

Absolutely, each game requires a different mindset and sometimes different skills. In a very real sense, I am creating a game to create a feeling, and depending on what that feeling is, my head is in a very different space. When I make commercial videogames, be they on consoles, iOS, PCs or Facebook, I'm in the mind of the player – well, I *am* the player – and I'm very aware of what the average player on that platform wants, the level of their game literacy (Facebook players generally aren't familiar with the concept of line of sight, for instance), game expectations, and also that "feeling" I mentioned earlier.

To what extent does the perceived audience of a *Ghost Recon* game influence your design decisions?

I am aware of what *GR* players want because I am a long-time *Ghost Recon* fan. I have literally logged hundreds of hours of play in those games. Knowing that *Ghost Recon* fans were expecting a more hardcore and extensible experience, I wanted to deliver that. There's a sign in our team area that reads, "I don't want to visit my friends. I want to kill them." Out of context, pretty concerning, but in a Facebook space, a friend visit is often little more than bribery. My board games have a very, very different design process, though the same fundamentals of how one can create a specific feeling through game rules applies.

The adverts for *Ghost Recon Commander* market its USP as a hardcore game for Facebook. Was this the main goal during development and, if so, how did you go about meeting those goals?

It was one of the goals, certainly. Ultimately, I wanted to create a game that both hardcore and Facebook players would immediately get. That meant putting a hardcore game inside what players have come to recognize as the Facebook game interface. Even though there is not a formal standard for what a game must look like, over the last couple of years, a consistent interface has developed emergently. I made some changes to the expected functionality – for instance, you're not visiting your friends for coins – but the look and feel is comfortable.

What opportunities does a social network offer a game that's not possible in other web-based platforms and how did you take advantage of this in *GRC*?

Quantity. Strictly speaking, you could make the same game off a network, but a social network allows players to enjoy a game with their friends who are already on the social network. It's not just limited to networks like Facebook or Google+ either. Consoles, companies and digital game services also have their own networks where players are connected through their gamer tag.



What's your opinion on the role of microtransactions? How do you avoid alienating the hardcore while also turning a profit? Is there interesting potential for game mechanics with these or are they just business?

That's a tricky question. It's something we're still exploring as an industry overall. For instance, microtransactions worked wonders back in the arcade days. Want to play more? Drop a quarter in. We also see microtrans occurring both inside and outside many hardcore games. Gold farming is just a form of microtrans where you're paying your real cash to someone in order to save time. All that said, some hardcore players do take issue with the microtrans model. I've often wondered how these games would do if instead of giving them away for free (literally, you can play all of *Ghost Recon Commander* without paying a dime), we had a big button with a price tag on it which unlocked the whole game instead. My hunch is that they wouldn't do as well. My own thoughts on it, both as a designer and a player, are still evolving.

Do you intend to create more Facebook games in the future? If so, what would you like to do with the format next?

Absolutely, and more analog games, too. I have one seconds from being done (I just need to type the rules up) called *PreConception: A Pregame Notgame*. Now that *Ghost Recon Commander* is out, I should be able to finish it. As for Facebook, *Commander* will have my attention for a while.

Visit the website at www.lootdrop.com

A MOMENT WITH…

JESPER KYD

GAME HIGHLIGHTS

- MDK 2 – [2000]
- Hitman: Codename 47 – [2000]
- Assassin's Creed – [2007]
- Forza Motorsport 4 – [2011]

GAME HIGHLIGHTS



>> MDK 2
[2000]


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>> Forza Motorsport 4
[2011]

>> Jesper Kyd is unusual among high-profile videogame composers. Though he has scored for both film and television, his roots are well placed in interactive media, going all the way back to the Amiga demo scene of the early Nineties. Currently working on Darksiders II, Kyd discusses his meteoric rise


JESPER KYD
COMPOSER

How did composing music for the Amiga demo scene influence the kind of composer you are today?

I spent eight years in the scene from '85 to '93 and I can think of no better place to practise and embrace creativity. For me personally, I spent my years in the scene experimenting with different ways to create music and trying to come up with new ideas. It's only later that I realised these years of experimenting in the scene led to a foundation for my music style, a foundation of experimentation and a way of creating music without restrictions. Had I been taught music in school, outside of the demo scene, my music would have sounded very different. In some ways the demo scene was a big part of my music education. Some people say my music sounds different and unique and if that's the case, the demo scene played a big role in this.



How did you make the jump from tech demos to videogames?

I founded a company with the members of [Danish demo group] Crionics and we started making videogames. We loved what we did so much that we wanted to do it full-time for a living. We were lucky enough that our first game was sold to Sega and they brought us over to the US to work on more games, which we were thrilled about; it was a dream come true for us. I think when you're working in the demo scene you dream about working on video games and in that sense our dream came true.

How dynamic does your music have to be when working in the interactive medium?

Scoring a project when you're not sure what decisions the player is going to make is a challenge. One of the ways we deal with this is to try creating as much music for every possible scenario, so that whatever the player chooses to do, the music will reflect this. However, for *Darksiders II* the main core of the music is the exploration music, the combat music and boss music, which takes up the vast majority of music writing. This approach fits with the *Darksiders* game experience. Scoring a huge amount of varied worlds from Heaven to Hell was very important for Vigil.

So you presumably had to adopt a lot of different styles for those varied settings?

Vigil was looking for a unique sound, not a typical Hollywood orchestra sound. The score includes music as varied as Celtic-inspired fantasy music to dark and uplifting ethereal themes. The Makers' music style is Celtic-inspired. They are the oldest race in the *Darksiders* universe and there is something eternal about this race that I wanted to capture. I recorded everything from bagpipes to Celtic vocals. The other half of the score is much darker. It was a challenge to create dark music which still retained a lot of depth, atmosphere and melody. I mixed unusual instruments such as old organs, spring reverbs, space echoes, analogue delays and more. I explored new ground with a lot of analogue vintage equipment, working in ways I hadn't done before.

To what extent do you think videogame music can be enjoyed in isolation from the game itself?

I think it's important that videogame soundtracks can stand on their own. One of the benefits, for example, is that you get people thinking about a certain videogame while they're listening to the music outside the game and that makes them want to go play the game.

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Seekers of Adoulin
gamesTM takes a look at expansion Seekers Of Adoulin as part of Square Enix's ten-year anniversary celebration

While the frequency with which Square Enix has released updates would make Quantic Dream impatient, each expansion has been embraced by the community.

Final Fantasy XI: Seekers of Adoulin

THE ORIGINAL FINAL FANTASY MMO CELEBRATES ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY WITH THE FIRST MAJOR UPDATE IN FIVE YEARS

It often feels like *World Of Warcraft* and *EVE Online* are two of a select cluster of recognisable MMOs to be attributed with mainstream commercial success. With large subscription numbers, iconic settings and relatively unique visuals, they are, without a doubt, the A-list stars of the genre.

Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XI* – the studio's first *FF*-based online endeavour – has been a quiet success in comparison. Maintaining respectable subscription numbers in its native Japanese turf and amassing thousands of franchise devotees in the West, it has been sitting on the periphery of the big hitters. Nevertheless, this year marks the impressive ten-year milestone for the game and Square Enix has decided to celebrate the Decennial with the fifth update – the first in five years – called *Seekers Of Adoulin*.

Seekers Of Adoulin introduces a brand new continent to the expansive land of Vana'diel, called Ulbuka, the hub of which is the Mediterranean-themed city of Adoulin. It's here that *FFXI* places a strong emphasis on players exploring the new land and discovering the treasures scattered across the region.

It's all about reclaiming the land, setting up an outpost – serving as a home point to gain new quests and travel between worlds – and cultivating the earth to live off the fat of the land. Square Enix has a tendency to take each new *FFXI* update in interesting directions (this expansion will be available as boxed retail for Xbox 360 and download-only on PC – not appearing on PS2 in the US or Europe) and *Seekers of Adoulin* seems to look no different in that regard.

There are plenty of fresh ideas being tossed around in *XI*, affirming that even with sister MMO *Final Fantasy XIV* undergoing a radical overhaul right now, Square Enix hasn't forgotten the loyal community that populates the *XI* servers. This new addition to the long-running MMO will be focusing on discovery and exploration, and should refresh the interest of veteran players and perhaps snag some more new players in the process.

While this spotlight on pioneering will mostly involve players traipsing around the environment in search of more loot and items, there will be little surprises along the way. New giant monster encounters, which will be littered throughout the new continent, add an element of danger in between cultivating the land, mining and raising cattle.

This will all come alongside the usual riches of improved loot, new crafting formulas and several new dungeons to pillage to your hearts content. However, there's also the addition of two new jobs, adding to the already crowded list of twenty vocational options.

INFORMATION

FORMAT: PC
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-House
ORIGIN: Japan





The new continent of Ulbuka has a distinct Mediterranean vibe to it. After ten years, *FFXI* players deserve a little relax time by the beach.

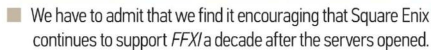


Expect plenty of new monster types to appear, with a much larger variety of scale as screen-consuming behemoths dominate the expansion.



"There are plenty of fresh ideas being tossed around in XI, affirming that Square Enix hasn't forgotten the loyal XI community"





We have to admit that we find it encouraging that Square Enix continues to support *FFXI* a decade after the servers opened.

THE FIRST OF the two new classes is Geomancer. Described as being an essential aid to comrades-in-arms, using elemental energies in ways that no sorcerer can, they pose a deadly threat to enemies. There's also a Feng Shui influence present in the new class, as polarity will also affect spells. So the direction the player is facing (north, south, east, west) will grant different bonuses to the player.

The second new class is the Rune Fencer. A slightly more straightforward job-type, acting as the game's third tank that uses runes to change between damage and defensive abilities. Using runes, there will be element-specific bonuses included, so there's an extra level of strategy layered on top of this new class.

Ten years on and it's little surprise that *Final Fantasy XI* is the most lucrative IP for the publisher, and given the commitment to delivering exciting and unique content, it has earned its mileage. Released sometime in 2013 on PC and Xbox 360, it will be interesting to see how the community will respond to the latest swathe of additions and changes introduced in the comprehensive *Seekers Of Adoulin* expansion. However, we suspect that the denizens of Vana'diel will find it a fitting enough celebration of a decade passed and a positive look forward at many more years of equally engaging, inventive and rewarding content sure to arrive in due time. Here's to ten more.

FATAL FANTASY

Since receiving a lukewarm reception at launch, Square Enix has been busy at work prepping phase two of the second *Final Fantasy* MMO, *Final Fantasy XIV*. Dubbed as *Final Fantasy XIV 2.0*, Square Enix hopes the revamped MMO will go into beta at the end of 2012. Improvements to the original include a fundamental reworking of in-game maps, the implementation of a new graphics engine, release of additional gender options and various other improvements to PvP. Basically, the whole thing will be completely different by the time it relaunches in 2013. It's encouraging at least that Square Enix didn't just abandon the ship as it was sinking, and we look forward to seeing the results of that loyalty.

MMO UPDATES

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

GAME OF THRONES MMO OFFICIAL NAME UNVEILED



Bigpoint has announced that the upcoming MMO based on the George R.R. Martin series of books and subsequent HBO show will be called *Game Of Thrones: Seven Kingdoms*. It will help to differentiate it from Cyanide Studio's two recent *Game Of Thrones* games that shared the same title.

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE 2 BETA LAUNCHES



As of 4 July, *Phantasy Star Online 2* will have ended its beta period and have officially commenced official service. The free-to-play MMO from Sega is Japan-only, but that's no reason why you shouldn't import it immediately. Expect **games™**'s verdict next month.

KNIGHT AGE MMO ANNOUNCED



3D fantasy MMO *Knight Age* was recently announced by developer Joymax and finished closed beta on 17 July. The USP of this medieval-themed epic is that players can perform a series of deadly attacks from mobile mounts. "Following the wildly successful launch of *Digimon Masters*, now is the perfect time for Joymax to focus on bringing yet another crown jewel to our growing library of quality titles that appeal to gamers of all ages and nationalities," said Nam-Chul Kim, CEO of Joymax.

GAMESCOM CUTS THROUGH THE MISTS OF PANDARIA IN AUGUST



Blizzard has revealed that it will be premiering the opening cinematic of its latest *WoW* expansion *Mists Of Pandaria* at Gamescom this month. The footage will be shown on 15 August, giving visitors a unique preview experience.



The new start area Troll Warzone will make the dense mythology a little easier to swallow for newcomers.



Enemies have been tweaked due to the combat changes, which means you'll have to revaluate how you tackle them in battle.





While the visuals have been improved, Runescape's basic presentation is still significantly behind other browser-based MMOs.

RuneScape Evolution Of Combat

THE LONG-RUNNING MMO UNVEILS A MAJOR UPDATE

RuneScape has been operating online in some form or another since 2001, and has now entered the beta phase for the biggest overhaul in the MMO's history since it first swung open its medieval gates over a decade ago. Veterans of the browser-based MMO will immediately notice that the game has undergone a significant design revamp, reworking visuals, animations and sound design in a step to bring the title up-to-date with genre contemporaries in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Beneath this superficial façade though, Jagex has buffed the gameplay with a specific eye on combat, providing a deeper tactical depth to the monster-slaying action. Multiple abilities will add a series of strategic choices for players in PvE and PvP encounters, and the addition of a slew of area-effect abilities transforms a substantial portion of the world into multi-combat battlegrounds.

"It's impossible to downplay the significance of this update," says RuneScape's lead designer Mark Ogilvie. "A rework of the combat system has been the most requested update from our community, and thousands of man hours have gone into developing a more fluid, interactive and tactical combat system. The Evolution of Combat update will fundamentally change the way people play and view RuneScape forever."

/// **Key in Jagex's** plans for the update is securing a fresh crop of warriors to the bustling servers, but there is also a lingering threat of alienating pockets of the existing community. This combat redesign demands more input from the players to capitalise on XP, which draws attention away from popular social features – previously, players could click on a monster and wait for the loot to drop, spending that time interacting with other players and clans.

Jagex's is fretfully shifting along a nightmarish tightrope of innovation and obligation, but in many respects it feels like the MMO has turned the clock back to day one. A new start area called Troll Warzone has been specifically designed to ease new players into the dense mythology of the MMO's lore, while also introducing the fundamentals to the gameplay mechanics in a more efficient method. Suffice to say, Evolution Of Combat is turning the world of RuneScape on its head; rebalancing classes, bringing combat to the forefront of the experience and underlining it with a savvy attitude to microtransactions.

There's no denying that it's an exciting time for denizens of Gielinor, whichever way you look at it. The question is whether Jagex has done enough to make the game appeal to newcomers. The visuals are still decidedly clunky, the community absurdly clannish, and it lacks the comprehensive nature of some of its contemporaries. Nevertheless, it's an encouraging step in the right direction for the long-running MMO.

INFORMATION

FORMAT: **PC**
PUBLISHER: **Jagex**
DEVELOPER: **In-house**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **2012**
PRICE: **Free**






GUILD CHAT

The most pertinent questions facing MMO developers today



Andreas van de Ven

Marketing director, Bigpoint

Free-to-play specialist Bigpoint is responsible for a wide range of popular MMOs, including Battlestar Galactica, Dark Orbit and Drakansang Online, and has big plans for the future of online gaming. Marketing director Andreas van de Ven discusses the company's attitude toward the business



Which business model makes the most sense to you for an MMO in 2012: free-to-play or subscription?

Very interesting question! Recently we have seen a lot more companies entering the free-to-play market space, which proves that the business model is working. At the same time we read news articles that the revenues of subscription-based games is on a downward slope. From the early days of Bigpoint, free-to-play has been the main business model for our games and still is responsible for our growth. This does not mean however that there is no market for subscription based games.

How important is console support for MMO success these days?

I think it is not that important as the quality of both browser-based games and client games has dramatically improved over the past few years. Add the fact that browser-based games can operate platform-independent, it is a great way to reach the largest audience. For example the game *Gameglobe* (a cooperation between Square Enix and Bigpoint) can truly stand the test with almost every console game, and it has added features that only browser-based games have.

Who do you consider to be your biggest competitor at the moment?

Competition has strongly increased over the past few years as more companies are entering the free-to-play market space and also because Facebook has become a big platform for browser-based games. So there are a lot of high-quality browser games on the market currently. As the quality of browser games has improved so much (have a look at the *Drakensang* demo for example), we are also competing against classic boxed titles, such as *Diablo III*.

What's the biggest challenge facing your business right now?

I will answer this from a marketing perspective, as this is my area of expertise. For us the most interesting challenge, is both internationalisation and localisation. Being a worldwide player it is important to adapt games to the specific countries. This is much more than simply translating games into another language, you have to think of cultural aspects, game mechanics, usability and payment methods.

> Being a worldwide player, it is important to adapt games to specific countries. This is more than simply translating

How do you see MMOs evolving throughout the next ten years?

That sure is a long time period to look at! Generally I think cross-platform distribution will become more and more important as gamers will play their favourite games on a variety of peripherals, like cell phone, tablet, notebook and TV. And they want to be able to play their games on each platform.

For more information on Bigpoint see www.bigpoint.com





There are currently several Bigpoint MMOs, with a wide variation of themes, from pirates and space, to zombies and high fantasy.



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Yes, Mom.

OK, Mom.

I'm Guybrush Threepwood, a mighty pirate. I don't have to worry about stuff like that.

No, Mom. I want to read games™ issue 126 out 30 August instead.


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